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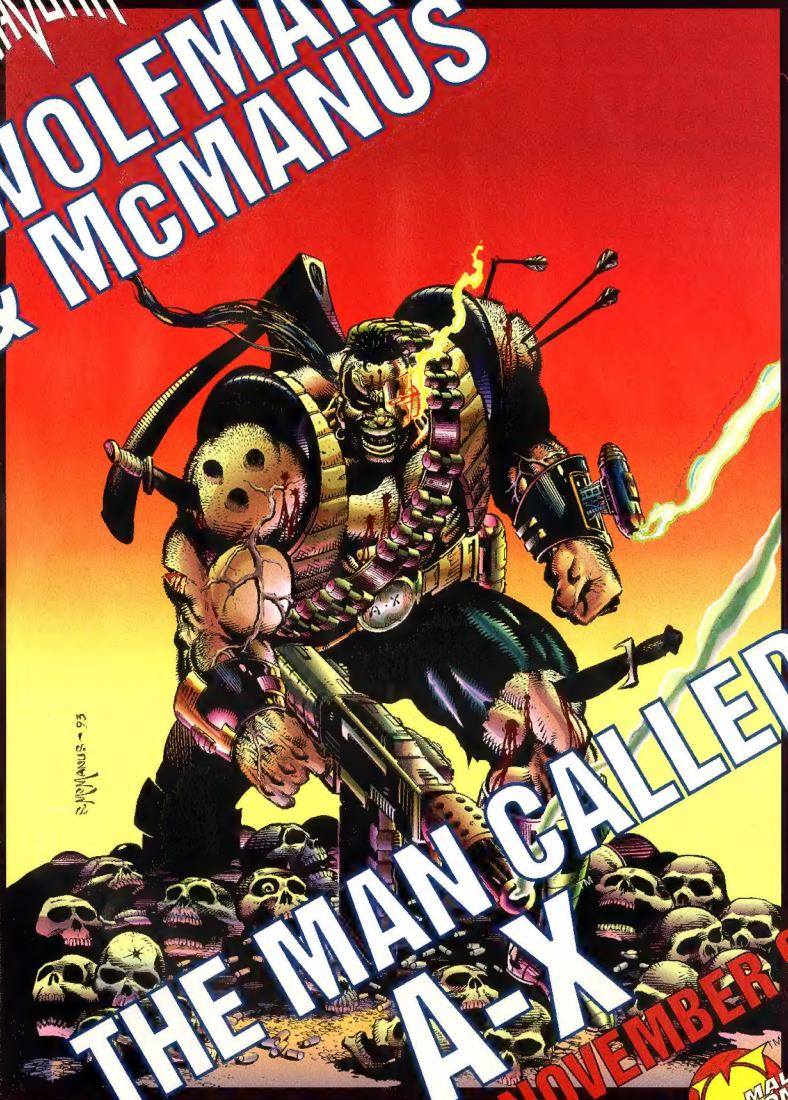

THE MAN CALLED A-X

NOVEMBER 94

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COMICS scene

Astonish Art: John Estes

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On the Comics Screen

6 **WORD BALLOONS**

8 **LETTERING**
Who knew about The Shadow?

36 **ANIMATED ARACHNID**
Spider-Man swings onto TV for new cartoon action.

49 **CANINE STORY**
Donovan Cook keeps trying to train "2 Stupid Dogs."

66 **ANIMATION SCENE**
Spend a very merry Christmas with all sorts of Toons.

70 **THE REPORTER**

On the Comics Scene

10 **WHEN LIGHTNING STRIKES!**
Black Lightning's back—and, really, it's about time!

15 **LOW-KEY LEGEND**
Inking & pencilling, Dick Ayers helped build the Marvel Age.

21 **THE A•X MYSTERY**
All wrapped up in enigma, he's big & carries a gun.

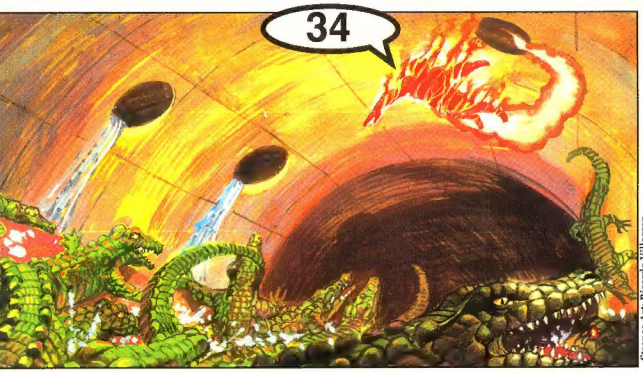
26 **ASTONISHING STUFF**
Hank Pym, the Wasp & the Hulk unite for action.

28 **OK, IS DAN BRERETON OVER-WORKED?**
On this night of the Nocturnals, he paints what he sees.

34 **STRANGE TEAMS**
Dr. Strange, Johnny Storm, the Thing & Nick Fury battle.

46 **SUSPENSE STORIES**
Captain America & Iron Man embark on a new mission.

54 **GOING PRO**
Young Jordan Raskin has a bright & artistic future.



Strange Art: Ricardo Villagran

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WORD BALLOONS

Sequel Hour

As superheroes grow older, just like regular human beings, they change. They get new costumes, altered powers, die (but not really), sport improved titles (and spiffed-up logos), get their backs broken by Bane, become villains, or, go into management. Just like regular human beings.

And as it's true of all the superheroes that COMICS SCENE readers know and love, so it's true of the X-Perts, that indescribable, somewhat unnameable super-team described (till the trademark paperwork shows up) in Word Balloons 18 months or so ago.

In the interim, many things have happened. Worlds have lived. Worlds have died. Conglomerates bought each other. Religious leaders were hypocritical, businessmen greedy, martyrs noble. Politicians lied. Athletes cheated. Workers worked. In other words, same old same old.

But for the Xenoperts, it's a whole new team:

X-Acto Man (Jim McLernon). Most of the X-Acto blades buried deep within his powerful X-Acto skeleton have been removed, replaced by computerized Quark and Typestyler artistic interface linkups. Remembers Tadpole Girl with fondness. Now leads the team. Still thinks it's named the X-Actoperts.

Marmoset Master (Marc Bernardin). New member! Bitten by a radioactive marmoset, he knows that with great powers come snappy epigrams. Once involved in a tragic romance with Tadpole Girl. Often accused of crimes committed by a one-armed man. Knows Quentin Tarantino like the back of his head.

Excelsior! (Michael Stewart). New member! Mythical True Believer brought to Earth to teach humility to a world gone mad. Makes fun of it instead. Thinks it's a mistake to adapt *Secret Wars* on the animated *Spider-Man*. Once involved in a tragic romance with Tadpole Girl. Dead ringer for Tom Cruise.

Photo: Joseph Clement/Courtesy Byron Preiss Visual Publicati

When Universes Meet: Spider-Man ("Just call me Amazing") personally delivers old friend Diane Duane's new Spidey novel and *The Ultimate Spider-Man* to the COMICS SCENE editorial trio: Marc Bernardin (a.k.a. Marmoset Master), Michael (Excelsior!) Stewart and Dave McDonnell (now known as Dark Workaholic).

Dark Workaholic (Dave McDonnell). Works, works, works. Edits, edits, edits. Gets very, very, very annoyed. No longer fun at parties. Able to melt a phone with one eyeball. Can't remember Tadpole Girl.

Bloody Pulp (Will Murray). Accomplished paperback writer. Such a close personal friend of The Shadow, he calls him by his first name (The). Had lunch with Tadpole Girl. Didn't order the frog legs.

Mr Prolific (Kim Howard Johnson). Still maintains he never met Tadpole Girl. His crusade to interview every comics creator who ever lived slowed somewhat by marriage, in Vegas, to—new member!—**Ms. Wonderful** (Laurie Bradach), art expert, uncredited photographer and wonderful person. Her secret identity unknown to anyone—err...until now.

Master Cynic (David Hutchison). Now official computer guru of the ExPerps. Always looks on the dark side of doom via e-mail. Has Tadpole Girl's home address and phone number on his hard disk. Never calls.

Some Like It Hotter (Luis Ramos). New member! Heroic artist whose life's work is designing the three-million-page holographic *Marilyn Monroe Monument Magazine* in two completely different editions and for foreign publication in Esperanto. Thinks Tadpole Girl dated his cousin.

Johnny Lucifer (Jean-Marc Lofficier). New member! Longtime consultant to Exacting X-Pertos has exited retirement to aid in the good fight. Speaks two languages; however, as American citizen, only understands one. Along with wife Randy, known as **Saint Lucifer**, tried to fix up Tadpole Girl with Frog Guy.

And, sadly, of course, as the heroism continues, previous members of the Exacting X-Pertos (whose identities you can figure out yourself) have departed to make way for the new action figures. Gone from the line-up:

The Shambler from the Stars. On loan from the Lovecraft Universe, and only temporarily in human form, has re-asserted alien nature, bubbling off to Shiggurath.

Man-Mountain Madman. No longer living in seclusion in the Himalayas, though he rents out his condo there. Now writes comic books about movies made from video games. Mostly Pong.

Tadpole Girl 2099. Unrelated to the tragic original Tadpole Girl except by name. Now married. Has new logo.

Hyper-Kinetic Lass. Seduced to the dark side of the Force, but got over it. Retired from heroism to enter marketing. Tired of hearing about Tadpole Girl. Still perky after all these years.

Needless to say, look for lotsa new Echo-Perts merchandise: phone cards, CD-ROM games and toilet paper. We're also considering mixing up all the creative teams, killing off Professor X, switching everyone's names and giving them each others' costumes, going back in time and changing all their hairdos, and having Bane break everyone's backs. Whatever sells.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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...This is just a short note to thank you for the animation column and articles that you run in COMICS SCENE. I find that Bob Miller seems to scoop the other magazines on a regular basis. While I read and enjoy the other material, I buy COMICS SCENE because I know it will have animation news. Thanks and keep it up.

Steven Rowe
840 Parker Drive, Apt. H
Florence, SC 29501

...In issue #43, you asked readers if we thought you covered too many comic movies. I don't feel that you cover enough. I've been collecting your magazine since issue #12. (And the only reason I bought that issue was for the picture of Matt Salinger as Captain America on the cover.) I have bought and kept every issue since.

My favorite section of your mag is the Comics Screen page. I've read in many of your letters pages that other readers feel the same way.

My suggestion: Why not start a Comics Screen magazine? Those readers who feel that you cover too many movies would be satisfied, and we readers who do not get enough would be equally happy.

There, of course, would be slow months where nothing was in production, but you could cover plans for movies. Right now you could keep us up to date on the plans for the *Fantastic Four* movie, the progress of *Batman Forever* (are they really going to call it that? It sounds so childish) and James Cameron's vision for Spider-Man. There's also the computer-generated ideas for the Hulk, Richard Donner's *X-Men*, the Black Panther movie and the Badger's TV prospects. The possibilities, as you can see, are endless.

You could also do "looking back" stories on things such as *The Flash* series, the new *Superman*, the *M.A.N.T.I.S.* movie and many other already-seen adaptations of comics.

Maybe you could even give information on how to find readers' favorite movies and television shows on video. I have spent two years looking for the *Wonder Woman* pilot episode with Lynda Carter.

Mitchell Sapp
596 S. Elm Street
Jesup, GA 31545

...An open letter to Joel Schumacher and Warner Bros.:

Jim Carrey is *NOT* The Riddler!!!

Jim Carrey is *The Scarecrow*!!!

Mickey Dolenz *is* The Riddler!!!

Anyone with a brain can see that. Oops, I forgot—we're dealing with Hollywood.

Jack White
Canton, MI

...*The Flintstones* was an enjoyable little film that had lots of room for improvement. It had a good script that seemed like an unproduced episode of the original series, all the right sight gags and prehistoric gimmicks, authentic cartoon sound FX and soundtrack music (except for the annoying BC-52s dance mixes of the theme and "The Twitch"). But what it lacked was believability. They could have made the animals a little less cartoony—Fred's clothes could have looked more like real leopard skins and less like a theme park costume. But most of all, John Goodman, at times, looked like he did not want to be making this movie. To a lesser extent, so did Rick Moranis, but Goodman put in an uncharacteristically wooden, bland performance.

Also, the film had some missed opportunities—how could they have left out Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm singing "Let the Sun Shine In," or the two waitresses doing, "Here We Come on the Run with a Burger on a Bun," or Arnold the paperboy?

Still, it was a fun film. But despite the record-breaking Memorial Day weekend, for my money, the best live-action cartoon movie is still *Popeye*.

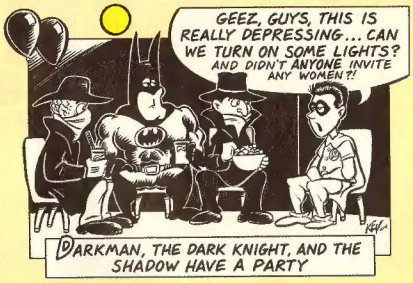
So what's next, guys? *The Jetsons* starring Chevy Chase and Goldie Hawn, with Danny DeVito as Mr. Spacely and Rodney Dangerfield as Mr. Cogswell?

The Shadow takes camp to operatic heights. It is both campy and gory, entertaining and unlikable, mesmerizing and boring. The script is rather dull and seems to exist just to create mood. I was somewhat disappointed in the Shadow's powers. I was hoping for some amazing yet believable hypnotic powers, but what we got was rather cartoony telekinesis and basic *Invisible Man* schtick. The direction was beautiful, although I must laugh every time I hear a filmmaker belittle the *Batman* films, only to put out product that is so obviously inspired by/ripped off from them. They even copped *Batman*'s tilted camera angles!

Alec Baldwin's portrayal of The Shadow was...well, let's just say we have a general idea of how Tim Burton's *Batman* films would have been if Adam West played Batman. All the actors gave one-dimensional, campy performances, including the otherwise amazing Penelope Ann Miller. As a result, none of the characters were very likable—or at least you didn't really care what happened to them.

Also, the visual impact of The Shadow was less than fulfilling. In artwork, the image of The Shadow was imposing, dynamic, chilling. I don't know if it was the oversized hat or the lame fake nose, but when I saw The Shadow in full view for the first time in the film, I chuckled. I guess this is how the previous generation felt the first time they saw Adam West in his purple and grey tights. Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending how you look at it), the fully costumed Shadow didn't stay on screen for longer than two minutes at a time. By the way, did I mention the amazing Penelope Ann Miller? The way she looked in that dress at the beginning of the film was well worth the price of admission!

Another major impact, or lack of impact, on the film was the audience. I attended the opening days of both Bat-films, as well as *The Shadow*. For


GEEZ, GUYS, THIS IS REALLY DEPRESSING... CAN WE TURN ON SOME LIGHTS?
AND DIDN'T ANYONE INVITE ANY WOMEN?!
DARKMAN, THE DARK KNIGHT, AND THE SHADOW HAVE A PARTY
Art: Kevin Brockschmidt

The Lone Ranger and Tonto appliance repair.
Art: Mike Wright

Batman, the theater was full. There were screams and cheers and applause the likes of which you only see at Three Stooges film festivals. For *Shadow*, the theater was only half full, with total silence save for occasional chuckles at the campier moments and some whistles for Penelope Ann Miller. Two boys in the aisle in front of me left two-thirds into the picture muttering, "Too dull, too long, too stupid." But is it fair to compare *The Shadow* to *Batman*? True, *The Shadow* and *The Green Hornet created* the genre, but *Batman perfected* it. Perhaps The Shadow is best left to radio and novels. Don't get me wrong—I didn't hate the film...I just didn't like it a lot. I would rank it just below *Rocketeer* and *Dick Tracy*, but above *RoboCop*.

In response to James Ferace's letter in CS #46, I'm sorry that one comment offended you so much, but that is all it was—one comment out of my entire letter. For one thing, I think you're overemphasizing that one comment. I do not want to see Batman revert to a Stanley Ralph Ross slapstick clown by any means. The point I was trying to get across is that it seems like the creative teams involved in *Batman* comics today are at a near-obsessive level of trying to make the character darker and darker, to the point where it could be depressing to read a *Batman* comic.

To make Batman—or *any* fictional character—real, you must involve the entire spectrum. Not everyone has a dark life all the time, nor does anyone have a bright, cheery life consistently. By just concentrating on being dark, they are, in essence, making Batman a one-dimensional cartoon character. To answer your question, "Who would watch his parents brutally murdered, then go on to deliver jokes?" Ask Bob Kane—after all, he and Bill Finger have The Batman cracking countless one-liners in their immortal *Batman* #1, yet it does not detract from the issue's darkness at all.

No hard feelings, James. Now I would like to spend a moment on the shocking changes of *Batman Forever*. I really can't foresee a problem with Val Kilmer as the Dark Knight. He's an excellent dramatic actor and physically, he's a more traditional choice than Michael Keaton. I've heard Keaton did not quit over money—he was truly concerned over the development and portrayal of Batman. Come on!!! This from a guy who said he never read a Batman comic and didn't care! This from a guy who called those who were concerned, just as he now says he is, "comic book fundamentalists" and told them to grow up and shut up! No, it was money.

Jim Carrey will be great as the Riddler if he plays him straight with just enough Carrey-isms to give him a scary, psychotic edge. Eat your heart out, Robin Williams!! Tommy Lee Jones as Harvey Dent. 'Nuff said. I have some doubts about Chris O'Donnell as Robin. He seems about three years too old and I just can't picture him living most of his life in a circus. Harvard, maybe, but not a circus, never a circus. *Batman Forever* is a crucial installment. If it's a hit, Batman, like James Bond, can look forward to decades of silver screen adventures.

Lee Solomon
2839 Marlbank
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...The long-awaited movie version of *The Shadow* finally came to theaters. For more than a decade, there had been rumors of the project and last year the deed was finally done.

Many were perplexed (myself included) at the word that Alec Baldwin would play the role of The Shadow. He was perhaps a bit younger than we expected, and certainly lacked the trademark physiognomy. We adopted a wait and see attitude.

So, how is it?

I'll have to confess that any movie about The Shadow would be welcome, if only for its boost to other Shadow material and interest. Anything better than the *Doc Savage* movie of the '70s was going to be a relief.

Well, this movie is actually *good*! It has great action, brilliant special FX and some wonderful storytelling. And best of all, it's presented with respect for the material, something obviously lacking in the *Doc Savage* fiasco.

I can't say enough about Baldwin's performance as The Shadow and as Lamont Cranston. He succeeded even beyond what we had hoped for. He now seems as if he were the only choice for the part all along. Let's hope that he'll be returning for several more films in the future.

The Shadow does not present the character in exactly the way any of us had him pictured. He's not the radio Shadow or the pulp novel Shadow, nor is he The Shadow presented in comic strips or comic books. But he is The Shadow nevertheless.

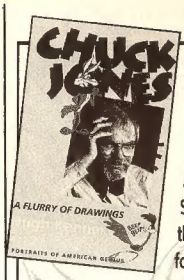
Let's not grouse about the character not being like what we expected. Let's be glad he turned out to be so much like what makes him special. Look at how the other heroic figures have been ruined on film and thank your good joss that this once worked.

And besides all that, it's a damn fine movie.

Name & Address Withheld

...AND DID I EVER TELL YOU GUYS ABOUT THE TIME THIS YOUNG UPSTART NAMED BANE BROKE MY BACK?
OH, YEAH? YOURS TRULY WAS DEAD ONCE!
ONLY A MILLION TIMES...
KESTER

Art: James D. Kester



"A comic genius, up there with Keaton and Mack Sennett. I thank him for teaching me so much about breaking all the laws of physics. . . just for the joy of it."
—Steven Spielberg

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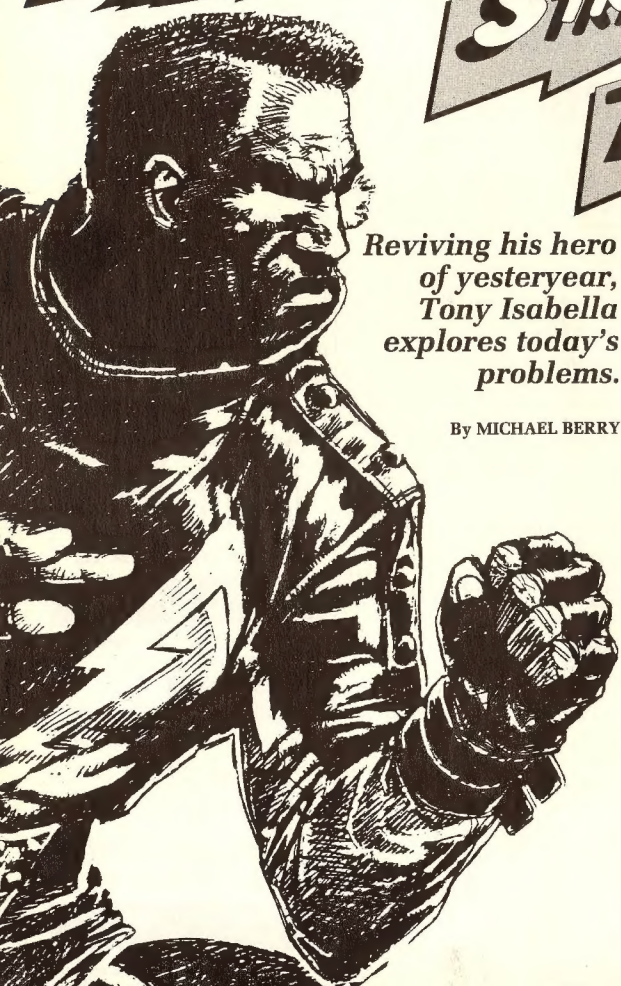
BLACK LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE



Reviving his hero of yesteryear, Tony Isabella explores today's problems.

By MICHAEL BERRY

Who says that lightning never strikes twice? Back in 1977, Black Lightning was introduced as DC Comics' first black superhero, a tentative step beyond the pantheon of all-Caucasian do-gooders. His book lasted only 11 issues, but his popularity was sufficient to earn him a prominent spot among the Outsiders during their adventures in the '80s.

Now, with that team disbanded (and then reformed for current adventures), Black Lightning has been given a second chance at carrying his own solo title. Original scripter Tony Isabella returns to write the ongoing series, and newcomer Eddy Newell handles the art chores.

Had it not been for Isabella, DC's first African-American superhero might have been an embarrassing travesty on an order of magnitude greater than Prez or Brother Power the Geek.

The company's first attempt at adding a note of ethnicity to their line-up was something called "The Black Bomber." Having just joined DC after a long tenure at Marvel, Isabella was asked to rewrite two scripts for a series featuring a white bigot, who in times of stress, turns into a black superhero.

"He had undergone chemical camouflage experiments in the Vietnam War to help him blend into the jungle better and wasn't aware that he sometimes turned into the Black Bomber," Isabella explains. "In each of the scripts, while in his white identity, he discovered that he had rescued black people and made [bigoted] comments."

Isabella pleaded with his editor, Paul Levitz, to deep-six the entire

THREE THINGS YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HEART. ONE - THE ROYALS RECRUIT ANY MORE KIDS AND I COME LOOKING FOR YOU.
TWO: YOU ONLY HAVE THREE MORE LIVES.
THREE AFTER THAT I HAVE TO GET CREATIVE.

Times are tough in Brick City and it takes a tough hand to set things right. There's a new man walking the beat—Lightning. Black Lightning.

Black Bomber idea. "I said, 'These comics will offend every single reader you have. The offices will be burned to the ground.' "

Levitz saw the merit in Isabella's argument and gave him a few weeks to draft a counter-proposal. Isabella, who had written such Marvel characters of color as Luke Cage and Black Goliath, wanted to create a hero to whom kids could relate, as opposed to writing about an African prince or an ex-con.

"Before I thought of the name or the powers," Isabella says, "I created Jefferson Pierce and made him a schoolteacher. I felt that *every* kid in the country has met a schoolteacher and talks with one on a daily basis."

The inspiration for the name came from an old *Wonder Woman* cover, which portrayed the superheroine lassoing a bolt of—you guessed it—black lightning. "The phrase 'black lightning' struck me as a punchy-sounding name," Isabella says. "This was back in the days of the black exploitation films, when it was common to refer to a character's race in a movie's title. *Blacula*, for example. In the case of Jefferson Pierce, he calls himself 'Black Lightning' because he's conscious of the fact that he's going to be a role model to the kids in the city, and he's very proud of his identity as a black man."

A teenaged Trevor Von Eeden, later the artist for DC's unrelated *Black Canary*, pencilled the book, and he and Isabella set about opening a new chapter in DC Comics history.

As originally conceived, Black Lightning was a former Olympic decathalon star who taught high school English and, in times of trouble, donned an afro "cowl" and a belt that gave him super-strength and electrical powers. In the original series, he battled members of The 100, a cabal of ganglords operating throughout the United States.

A product of the late '70s, the original *Black Lightning* doesn't quite hold up for the '90s. Asked whether the series contained anything that embarrasses him now, Isabella immediately says, "The afro wig! What was I thinking of? At the time, we were looking for something different for the mask, and there were a lot of black guys walking around with big hair. What made sense in 1977 doesn't today."

Isabella is still proud of those original stories. "They broke some new ground. I'm happy with the way they turned out, because Jefferson Pierce came across as a real person, and that's something I don't see in many comic book characters today."

Despite its likably different protagonist and fresh take on the superhero genre, *Black Lightning* didn't even last a year. Isabella blames the cancellation on what he calls "the infamous DC Implosion."

"As I understand it, someone higher up looked at comic book sales figures for the first time in decades and saw that they were much lower than he remembered. He apparently didn't notice that the comics cost four or five times as much as they did when he last looked. So, a great number of DC books were cancelled all at once. I was told that *Black Lightning* was right on the border of not being cancelled, but it didn't make the final cut."

After losing his own book, Black Lightning and Isabella parted company, the hero making occasional appearances in *World's Finest* and *Detective*. The results, though, weren't much better than lackluster. It wasn't until Mike W. Barr selected Black Lightning for inclusion in *Batman & the Outsiders* that the character really came into his own again.

"The writers who immediately followed me never got the hang of the character," Isabella observes. "Mike Barr, on the other hand, did an excellent job. The only change he made was to play down Black Lightning's super-strength, but that was because he had Geo Force to do that stuff."

Isabella says that he has nothing but the highest respect for what Barr did with Black Lightning. "I've often told him that he's the second-best writer of Black Lightning on Earth. And he has said the same thing about me."

When the Outsiders went their separate ways, Black Lightning again fell into comics limbo. That didn't mean, however, that the character was forgotten. Notes Isabella, "Fans would constantly come to me at conventions and tell me how much Black Lightning meant to them." Isabella decided to push for another solo book. This time

Says Isabella, "Jefferson Pierce calls himself *Black* Lightning because he's conscious of the fact that he's *going* to be a role model."

All Black Lightning Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 DC Comics

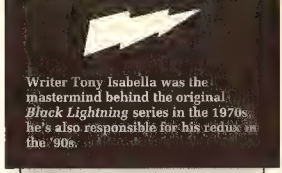
he set out to create "the most realistic superhero comic you can do while still having it set in the DC Universe."

Isabella ran a comic book store in downtown Cleveland for 11 years, and most of his customers were inner-city kids. Drawing on their experiences, newspaper accounts and numerous personal interviews, Isabella researched the conditions of America's large cities to an incredible extent.

He says, "I've never done so much research on a comic book. It's an ongoing process. I'm constantly talking to students, teachers, policemen, criminals, you name it. If they have some information that will help me make *Black Lightning* a more realistic book, I've gone after it."

Although Black Lightning operates out of an area of housing projects known as "Brick City," the name of the larger municipality is never mentioned. Isabella isn't specifying the setting because he doesn't want readers to assume that the problems he depicts only exist "someplace else." Some of the plots, however, are based on incidents for which Isabella has first-hand knowledge.

"My hometown is a place where the poorer neighborhoods have been virtually raped by the city's financial and government leaders," he says. "Less than two miles away from where the city of Cleveland is building a stadium for a last-place ball team whose owners are among the richest people in America, there are people going hungry, living without the basics. This is something that's going to be addressed in *Black Lightning*."



Writer Tony Isabella was the mastermind behind the original *Black Lightning* series in the 1970s; he's also responsible for his redux in the '90s.

The first four issues deal with a drug gang and its effects on the community. From there, Isabella plans to investigate a whole host of urban ills, from homelessness to the disenfranchisement of inner-city voters.

Isabella says, "Look in your newspaper. If something there addresses a problem the cities are facing, we'll eventually get around to it."

Black Lightning won't be all gritty social realism, though. The book's action-adventure content will also be high. A major new supervillain appears in issue #2, but Isabella won't reveal his name or power.

All the writer will say is, "He's one of the best, if not the best, villain I've ever created. Eddy Newell has done a wonderful job bringing him to life."

The supporting cast of *Black Lightning* features several intriguing newcomers, including Detective Tommy Colavito, a policeman who forms an uneasy alliance with Black Lightning, and Beagle, a blind street informant who resides in an abandoned Volkswagen. Pierce's ex-wife Lynn Stewart is still a presence in his life, albeit offscene. And even Tobias Whale, the most prominent villain from the original run, may eventually be back for a return engagement.

Of course, the book's focus will be on Jefferson Pierce, and Isabella hopes that Pierce's distinctive brand of heroism will draw new readers to this series.

"Jefferson Pierce is very much a hero of the old school," he says. "To turn his back on his fellow man is something he just cannot do. In the best of all possible worlds, Pierce would just be a very happy, dedicated schoolteacher. But because he has these super-powers, he has to use them."

Like most of us, Pierce has undergone significant changes during the past decade-and-a-half. Isabella says, "He has gotten a little older, as I have. The world has gotten harder. Jeff remains the same guy, but he's a bit more determined. When the world around you gets worse, you either give in or fight all the harder."

In the wake of the alien Invasion of DC's Earth, Black Lightning's metagene was switched on, and now his electrical powers are completely natural. Over the course of the second series, he'll discover new ways to use them, including detonating explosions, short-circuiting security systems and developing a "radar sense" like certain electric eels.

According to Isabella, another strong selling point for the new series will be Eddy Newell's artwork.

"Eddy is very illustrative without sacrificing dynamics," says Isabella. "We had a half-hour discussion about the book and he nailed the look of it the first time out. I give him full scripts, so he gets a rough idea of what the characters look like, but he's basically doing all the design work, and he just keeps getting better and better.

"At the risk of tooting my own horn, with my script for the first issue and Eddy's artwork, I don't think there is a publisher in comics who would have looked at what we have done and *not* wanted to publish the book. I'm very proud of this series. I think it's the best work I've ever done."

Batman may eventually guest. The Wayne Foundation, however, is definitely in the background of *Black Lightning*. Jeff Pierce is the recipient of a large grant, which he'll be using at Carver High.

Says Isabella, "In my mind, I'm sure Bruce Wayne gave him this money expecting he would go out and buy a Black Lightning Car or something. But that's one of the differences between Batman and Black Lightning. Black Lightning fights crime because it is necessary, but he's more interested in simply protecting the community."

What about Halo, Katana and the other Outsiders? Now that Mike Barr has revived that team, wouldn't Black Lightning enjoy a crossover reunion?

"Mike and I are talking about that," Isabella reveals. "Mike and I have been friends forever, and we've never had the chance to work together. We would relish the opportunity, but we're just not sure *when* it will happen."

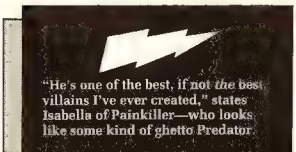
Although it's clear that Isabella knows the direction in which he wants to take *Black Lightning*, it's hard to pin him down to any specifics beyond the first few issues. He says, "I'm not one of those writers who plots out the issues three years in advance. I like to keep myself guessing as much as the readers. We're never going to know that far in advance where we're going. That may change if we suddenly have to start taking part in crossovers and stuff like that. My own preference would be to avoid these company-wide crossovers, but I might not have any say-so in that."

Isabella occasionally gets asked why he feels qualified to write an African-American character. "Apparently, there are some people who find it odd that a white writer is scripting the character," he says. "I can't know exactly what it's like to be a black man in American society, but I doubt that there are any of us who haven't experienced some sort of prejudice and been made to feel like an outsider. I take those feelings and couple them with the research, and I try to tell my stories with as much truth and craft as I can bring to bear."

The final proof, of course, will come when people read the first issues of the new *Black Lightning*. "That's when they'll be able to see whether I've done my job right," Tony Isabella says. "But obviously, if we could only write about what we were, I would pretty much be limited to writing about middle-aged Italian guys who write comics.

"And, quite frankly, even I wouldn't buy that book." GS

Black Lightning Art: Eddy Newell/Ron McCain


"He's one of the best, if not *the* best villains I've ever created," states Isabella of Painkiller—who looks like some kind of ghetto Predator

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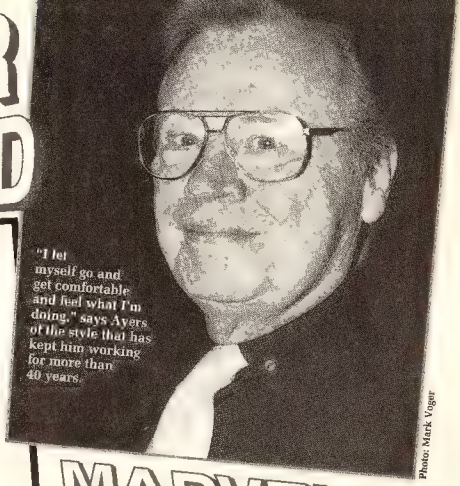


"I let myself go and get comfortable and feel what I'm doing," says Ayers of the style that has kept him working for more than 40 years.

Photo: Mark Voger

Through his work inking Jack Kirby's pencils in *The Fantastic Four*, Dick Ayers helped bring Marvel back from the brink of bankruptcy.

Present at the creation, Dick Ayers helped craft a Marvelous age of superheroes.

By WILL MURRAY & MARK VOGER

Dick Ayers walked into a comics convention in White Plains on Labor Day, 1992.

"Steve Stern was there, of Zen Comics," Ayers recalls. "And in a big loud voice, he said, 'There's the guy who saved Marvel! If they had had anybody else inking Jack Kirby's work, it wouldn't have come across! *The Fantastic Four* would have flopped!' I never thought of it that way, but to have it come from a publisher made me feel good. That was my reward."

Creative careers can take strange twists. Although Ayers drew for Marvel Comics on and off for some 40 years, to many he's best remembered as one of Marvel's mainstay inkers. "I started in 1951 and went straight through to about 1974, when I started to appear in DC," he notes with undisguised pride.

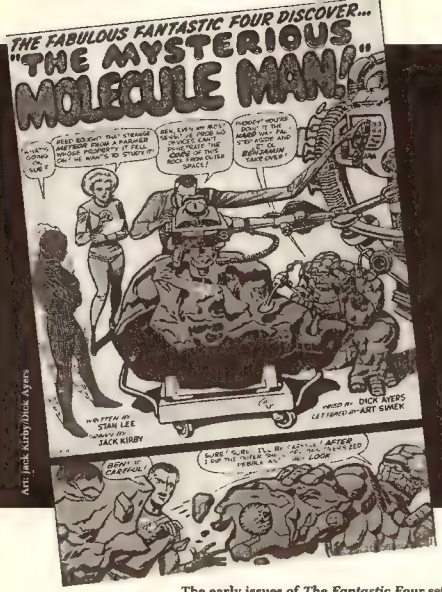
Dick Ayers is a survivor. When Marvel Comics—then called Atlas—imploded in 1957, throwing artists Bill Everett, John Romita and others out of work, Ayers hung on, drawing Westerns from Stan Lee scripts by night and working in the offset department of a greeting card company by day.

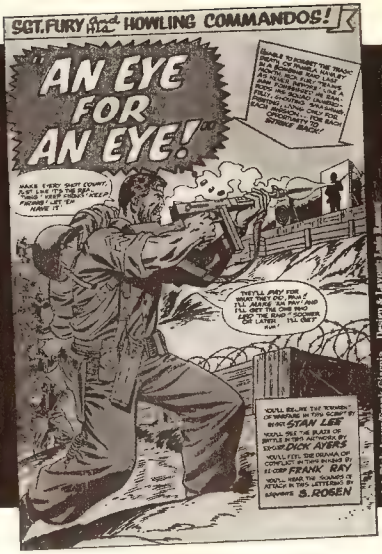
But the comics industry gave every sign of dying. Ayers remembers the bleak day Lee told him it was all but over. "I had only *Wyatt Earp*. Then, *Wyatt Earp* became a bi-monthly. I was struggling. It came to a point that Stan himself, when I had delivered one of the *Wyatt Earp* stories, said, 'Dick, it's time to just get out of the business.' The way he put it, his uncle [publisher Martin Goodman] walked by the office and wouldn't even wave to him. It was like the ship was sinking and we all had to get off.

"So, I went to the post office and took the test. I called Stan up and said, 'Well, I've taken the test.' He said, 'Let me just send you one thing to do before that happens.' And he sent me a cover that Jack Kirby had pencilled. Then, he sent me a monster story. And on one of his yellow carbon sheets—I still have it—he wrote, 'I love ya!—Stan.' And I was off and running inking Jack."

The story was "I Created Sporr," published in *Tales of Suspense* #11, September 1960. It launched an artistic collaboration that would help cement the Marvel Age of Comics. Ayers immediately became the primary Kirby inker, whether it was in *Tales of Suspense* or *The Rawhide Kid*. Kirby himself took one look at Ayers' inks and hired him to replace Wally Wood on his *Sky Masters* newspaper strip.

"Oh, I let myself go," Ayers recalls.





The early issues of *The Fantastic Four* set a standard that still remains the measure of excellence in comics.

Ayers was also a successful penciller in his own right, doing Westerns and also an acclaimed decade-long run on *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*.

"I just enjoyed it. As Stan put it, I *embellished*. I did my thing over Jack's pencils. I was happy doing Western fillers and I got accustomed—comfortable—doing Jack's work. Jack did somewhere around 100 pages a month, and I did 80-90 percent of his work."

So great was the demand for someone to realize the prolific Kirby's pencils that Ayers—who formerly pencilled, inked *and* lettered his *Wyatt Earp* work—seldom drew even the brief five-pagers that rounded out *Tales of Suspense* and its companion titles in those difficult pre-superhero days.

Westerns were an Ayers specialty through the '50s and '60s, including *Wyatt Earp*, *The Rawhide Kid* and *Two-Gun Kid*.

"One day," he admits, "I did get a little frustrated because the rate was low and I had to turn out so many pages a day to make a living wage. I did a *Rawhide Kid* exactly the way it was pencilled, no more, no less. When I took it in, Stan said, 'My God, I didn't hire you to trace. If I wanted somebody to trace, I could pick somebody off the street. I want you to add to it. If it's just two figures there, a vignette, throw a silhouette of a Western town in behind. Just draw with your brush,' was the way he put it. And when I came home and did it that way, I was back to really being comfortable. You gotta tighten up to trace. It's worse than drawing. It looked like a love story, Stan said."

During the '50s, Ayers' primary strips were Ghost Rider, Rawhide Kid and Human Torch. In the '60s, he returned to draw all three features—except now entirely different characters were operating under the old superheroic names.

"I started when he was called Rawhide because he used a whip," Ayers says of the original Rawhide Kid. "That was just after [artist] Joe Maneely was killed in an accident. Then came the Comics Code, and you couldn't use a whip anymore. The closest thing I could think of was to put chaps on him. And I don't remember if the writer added the little boy, Randy, to it or not. It wasn't until Jack got assigned the pencilling that they changed the character, [to be] shorter."

Killed in the 1957 Atlas implosion, *The Rawhide Kid* was revived in 1960 as a Stan Lee/Jack Kirby fugitive gunslinger in the *Kid Colt, Outlaw* tradition. Eventually, Kirby moved on and Ayers took over the strip—a pattern that would be repeated over and over as the Marvel Universe grew. When the new Human Torch was spun off from *The Fantastic Four*, Kirby launched the Torch's *Strange Tales* run. Then, Ayers stepped in.

This was not the android Torch that Ayers had been drawing 10 years before—the Comics Code had extinguished him—but it didn't bother the artist in the least. "I enjoyed the Torch," he says. "I was proud of him. I liked him better as a teenager with limitations—the flame that died out after seven minutes—than I did in the '50s. It made him more believable."

But Ayers' comfort factor was soon strained by the abrupt introduction of another FF alumnus. "Much to my

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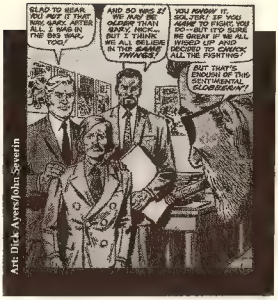
chagrin, Stan put the Thing in there," Ayers says with a sigh. "I didn't like drawing him. When I first started inking the Thing, I had him looking like he was made of mud. Then, somebody [George Roussos] made him look like he was chiseled little bricks. I could *never* figure out what he was. To this day, when I draw the Thing, I have these damn squares to contend with."

By this time, Ayers was working Marvel style. "I was given plot synopses, as I remember, and I just did my thing. The whole philosophy was that I would only do what I was *told* to do. I didn't want to create any characters because I foresaw what would happen. You didn't get any percentage of it."

It wasn't his preferred way of working, however. "I like a full script, because then I can feel like I'm an actor. In other words, I would read the balloon dialogue and then express myself through the character in response to the words. Whereas, if I draw from a synopsis, *they* fit the words to what I draw. I might either overact or underact. You get somebody shouting when they should be whispering."


GLAD TO HEAR YOU NOT IF THAT NIK GAS ATTER ALL IS IN THE BAG, SEAR, TOO!
AND SO WAS IT! WE MAY BE OLDER THAN WE USED TO BE, BUT WHEN WE ALL PULLED IN THE SAME TWAVES!
YOU KNOW IT, SIR, THAT IF YOU WERE TO FIGHT YOU WOULD BE AS GREAT AS ALL WISHED TO CONCLUDE ALL THE FIGHTING!
BUT THAT'S ENOUGH OF THIS SENTIMENTAL CLOBBERING!
Art: Dick Ayers/John Severin

"We were a good team," recalls Ayers of his collaboration with inker John Severin (left). That's Ayers and writer Gary Friedrich face to face with Fury.

One of the mysteries of the early Marvel Age of Comics was why the top Kirby inker wasn't given *The Fantastic Four* to ink from the first issue. Even more strange is the fact that the first two issues seemed to have been finished by Christopher Rule, the elderly inker whom Ayers supplanted on Kirby's monster stories a scant year before. Ayers himself has no ready answers.

"I don't know," he confesses. "Maybe Stan didn't think it was going to go anywhere either. I inked *The Fantastic Four* from #6 to #20—some 14 issues. The first one I did, Joe Sinnott had inked some of the figures, like Sue Storm. Then, he got assigned something else."

The *FF* assignment literally came without advance warning. "Whatever the mailman brought me, I did," Ayers says matter-of-factly. "And I enjoyed that. Especially through the period with the mystery stories, the war stories and the Westerns. Because I never knew what I was going to get."

Yet Ayers may have played a key but unsung role in launching one of Marvel's earliest superheroes. Just as *The Fantastic Four* was getting underway, Ayers was called on to ink a Kirby fantasy story, "The Man in the Ant Hill," for a pre-hero issue of *Tales of Astonish.*

"I enjoyed the monsters," Ayers relates. "They had terrific names—Sporr and Fin Fang Foom and all that. Remember Ant-Man? That's where he started. I enjoyed that first Ant-Man story so much I told Stan in a memo, 'We gotta do something with him.' "

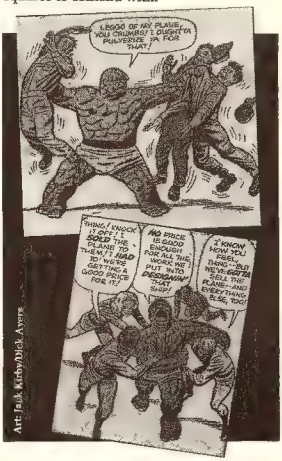
Nine months later, Henry Pym was given a Kirby costume, cybernetic helmet and Ayers to ink his exploits. Later, when he became Giant-Man, Ayers took over the strip entirely, as he had with other Kirby books like *Two-Gun Kid* and *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos.* It was on the latter that Ayers had his greatest success, digging in for a decade-long run.

Art: Dick Ayers

THE HUMAN TORCH
SANDMAN STRIKES!
STORY BY STAN LEE
DRAWN BY DICK AYERS
LETTERED BY ART SIMEK
NOT EXACTLY PICTURE THE OLD E.B. PLAINE SMALLTOWN SCENE, IS IT? AND I HAD A TITLE ACTION-GAINING WORD, TOO—HERE COMES THE TONGUE!
IN THIS FAST-PACED ACTION THRILLER YOU WILL MEET ONE OF THE MARVELOUS COMIC CHOICES AND CHANCES OF SUPER-VILLAINY THE UNDERWORLD GRAPEVINE'S FUSSIN' 'BOUT! BEWARE THAT BIG BOOTED BRUTE! THE SONIC EXPLOSION WHILE HE WAS IN THE GEARINGS! THE SHOCKING DEATH-DEFYING ARCH THE HEACH FILLED WITH HIS OWN FLESH AND BLOOD! BUT YOU WILL SOON SEE FOR YOURSELF!
A VERY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH THIS AMAZING MARVEL MAGAZINE!

The Human Torch was spun off into *Strange Tales* and Ayers handled the art chores. "I enjoyed the Torch," he says. "I was proud of him."

"I had him looking like he was made of mud," remembers Ayers, who inked the pre-rocky Thing. "Now I have these damn squares to contend with."

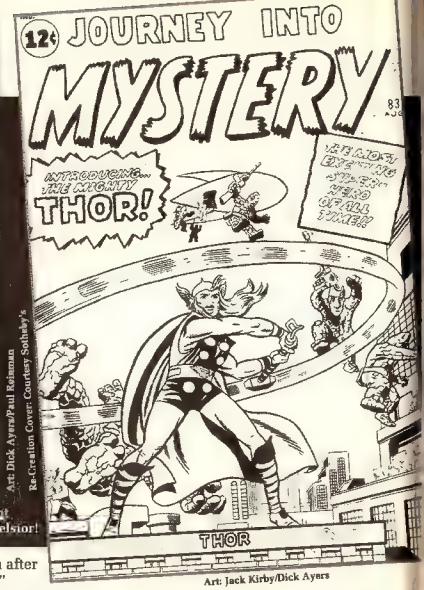

I SHOOT MY PLASMA, YOU CRUMBLE! I DISINTEGRATE YOU, YOU PULVERIZE, I'A FOR THAT!
THING, I KNOCK YOU DOWN! I'LL GO TO THE MOON! I'LL WALK ON THE WATER! I'LL GET TO A GOOD PRICE FOR IT!
NO PRICE IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR ALL THE WORK WE GET TO DESTROY THAT SHIP!
I KNOW NOW YOU ARE NOT MY BROTHER! BUT I'VE GOTTA SELL THIS FLAME-THING EVERYTHING I'VE GOT, TOO!
Art: Jack Kirby/Dick Ayers

Art: Dick Ayers/Frank Giacoia

WHILE, IN THE LONELY HANGAR, STARTLED BY THE SUDDEN BLARE OF THE EAR-SPLITTING SIREN, VON KRUMMPT TURNS HIS HEAD FOR A SECOND...
MISTER, NOBODY SHOULD EVER TAKE HIS EYES OFF A COMMANDO!

The artist describes the Nick Fury stories as having "the Baron Munchausen approach," exaggeration used to generate maximum excitement.

WE HAVEN'T A CHANCE! HE'S GOT US!
STEADY, LEE! DON'T LET HIS SIZE THROW YOU! I'VE GOT A TRICK OR TWO UP MY SLEEVE! WATCH—
FIRST, BY DUCKING UNDER THE ASSAULT AND ROLLING WITH THE BLOW, I TURN HIS WEIGHT ADVANTAGE AGAINST HIM, IN "THE BEST JUDO FASHION!!"
I HOPE YOU'RE TAKING NOTES, LEE—THERE MAY BE A TEST LATER!
AND NOW, MANEUVER #2—A QUICK CHANGE IN SIDE!
THERE'S NOTHING LIKE HAVING SUNRISE ON YOUR SIDE—
WHAM!
AND, THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT! —LIKE THIS!
8



Art: Dick Ayers/Paul Reinman
Re-Creation Courtesy Sotheby's

Art: Jack Kirby/Dick Ayers

"We gotta do something with him," Ayers told editor Stan Lee upon seeing Ant Man/Giant Man. How about a story with intelligent Communist Gorillas? Excelsior!

The final collaboration between Kirby and Ayers was a series of re-creations of their classic covers for Sotheby's to auction off, proving just how much respect they had achieved.

when you're in combat—I was in the Army Air Corps—you can do different things that you can't do when you're on base. I would remember the way we would dress—civilian ski socks, a shoulder holster, different clothing that you would scrounge up—and I was able to visualize the stories more comfortably."

Promoted as "The War Comic for People Who Hate War Comics," *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* was initially so broadly drawn that it came close to being a lampoon of DC's *Sgt. Rock*.

"It was the Baron Munchausen approach, that's the way I like to think of it," Ayers explains. "Things would be exaggerated. For instance, Fury could be parachuting out and some Messerschmidt would attack him and he would shoot his Tommy gun and blow the guy right out of the cockpit! But the reader would accept it."

On *Sgt. Fury*, it was Ayers' turn to be inked—primarily by John Severin. "I really loved *Sgt. Fury* when I was teamed up with John Severin. If I indicated something, he elaborated on it. If I drew a tank, boy, he made it *believable*. If I put medals on a guy's chest, he added the ribbons. He gave it a touch. We were a good team."

So enthusiastic was Ayers he broke a personal rule against creating characters when the death of Junior Juniper in issue #4 left a void among the Howlers. "Stan said, 'Let's have a character in *Sgt. Fury* to replace Junior.' That's how Percy Pinkerton came about. I designed him after David Niven, more or less."

It was on *Sgt. Fury* that Ayers first began doing full-length stories from Lee synopses. "I think Stan must've been a genius for being able to perceive who could work which way," he says. "Now, with myself and Kirby, all he had to do was give us the germ of an idea, and we would come up with a good 23 pages. Stan just said, 'This is what Sgt. Fury's gonna do this month. We're going to go to Africa and free so-and-so, do this and that, and then come back.'

"One time, Stan called me up and said, 'I don't have an idea this time. *You* think of something.' So, I kicked it around all day, and I couldn't think of anything. I'm in bed that night, and I *still* can't think of anything. My wife said, 'Why don't you have Fury go behind the lines and help a nun bring out a lot of kids?' I didn't think they would go for bringing religion into the comic, but I called Stan and he said, 'That's great! You write the plot!' And it came out as my favorite. Frank Giacoia inked it. Beautiful story."

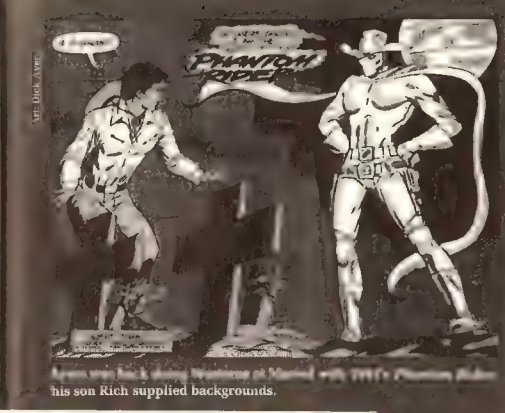
Art: Dick Ayers/Paul Reinman

Hold tight true believers! It's the Thing and the Torch facing the deadly, menacing evil of...Paste Pot Pete!

By that time, the Marvel Universe was jelling. New superheroes continued to explode into life like bursting novae. When Bill Everett left *Daredevil*, and a succession of artists couldn't—or wouldn't—stay with the strip, Lee offered it to Ayers.

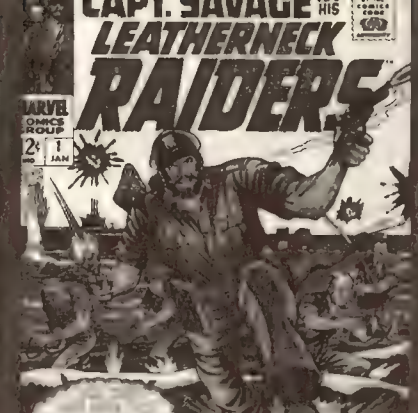
"I pencilled an issue—a couple of pages—but it never came out," he states. "It had Ka-Zar in it. I can't remember much more. Then, Johnny Romita came into the office," Ayers adds with a chuckle, "and he got it."

But for the fluke of Romita returning to Marvel for the first time since the Atlas implosion, Ayers might today be remembered as a seminal *Daredevil* artist. Still, he left his mark on the feature. "I remember being called in to help Frank Giacoia, who was behind in his inking, on *Daredevil*," he says.



Art: Dick Ayers

Ayers was back doing Western at Marvel with 1967's *Phantom Rider*; his son Rich supplied backgrounds.



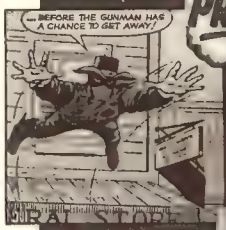
In different incarnations, Ayers' career has been haunted by the Western character who was originally called the Ghost Rider, the Phantom Rider in reprints and more recently, in new Ayers stories in the back pages of *The Original Ghost Rider*, the Night Rider.

"I'm not happy with that," he says wryly. "I like the guy, but he has been around me since 1949 or '50!"

Originally published by M.E. Enterprises, the Ghost Rider was revived by Marvel in 1967. Ayers drew it from the first issue. Once again, he discovered a once-familiar character had been transformed. This time Ayers wasn't happy.

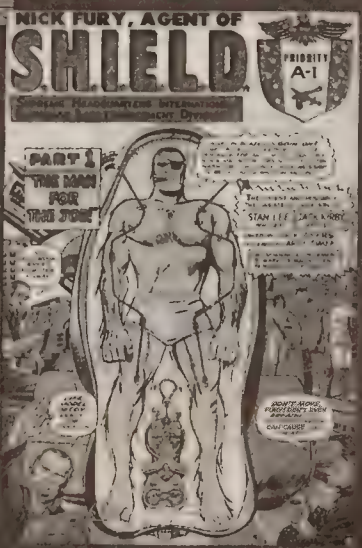
"Rex Fury, the original Ghost Rider, was a federal marshal," Ayers explains, "which meant he could show up in any town. Marvel made him a schoolteacher. I wasn't agreeable to it. They just sent me the script and that's what he was. Period. I would have ar-

(continued on page 58)



Art: Dick Ayers

"I was perfectly happy doing Western fillers and I got accustomed—c... doing Jack's work," reveals Ayers of his heyday.



Art: Jack Kirby/Dick Ayers

Femforce Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Americomics

"Last year was the busiest year of my life," says Ayers, still hard at the work he loves as the artist behind AC Comics' *Femforce*.

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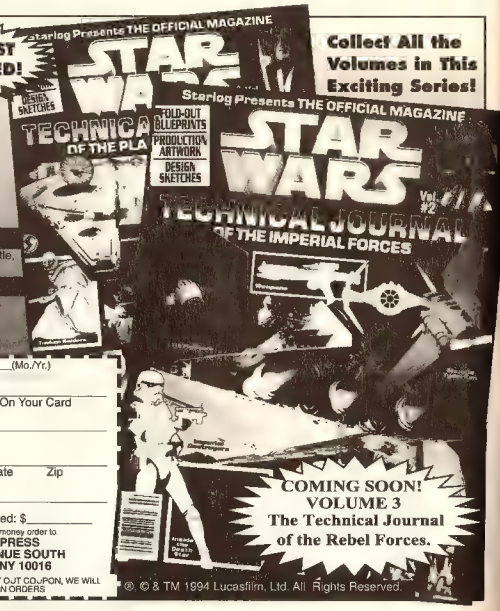

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A•X

Creators Marv Wolfman & Shawn McManus know exactly who The Man Called A•X is.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

One of the toughest new characters in comics has a powerful ax to grind. Actually, he's *The Man Called A•X*, which is also the title of his new limited series from Malibu's Bravura line. The five-issue storyline (actually a six-parter, including a zero issue) is the creation of veteran comics writer Marv Wolfman and artist Shawn McManus.

"I can't actually reveal who AX is, because that's part of the series' secret," Wolfman explains. "The Man Called A•X is a character who appears in the city of Bedlam with a mission. His mission is to wipe out the gangs that control Bedlam. The problem is, as we discover in the first issue, that AX doesn't know what his name is—that's why he's just called AX. He doesn't know how or why he knows all of this. Because the character doesn't even say anything until the end of the first issue, these are things the reader will discover along with the character himself. Readers will be asking these questions, and suddenly they find that the character is also asking those same questions! He's truly a mystery man—I think he says three words in the entire first book."

Wolfman and McManus had wanted to work together on a project for several years. "Finally, the opportunity came, and Marv gave me a couple of scripts that he wanted to do something with, scripts he had tried to sell to the movies or TV," says McManus. "I actually didn't care for either very much, so I gave him a visual of the character for him to write something about."

"Shawn asked me to create something that would be heavy, solid action with a single lead character," Wolfman notes. "I went back to my files and found an idea. Originally, this character was going to be a villain, and I was going to use the city of Bedlam for another book. But, neither of them worked. Only when I put the two together and transferred the character from villain to hero did everything start to fit.

"I goosed up the action an awful lot, because I wanted to tell a story through action. I didn't want to tell a story where there were 12 pages of heroes sitting around talking; I didn't want pages where the information was given through talk. I wanted *all* of the information and characterization to come out through action; what a character *does* rather than what he *says*. I've been very influenced in the past year by the films of John Woo [*The Killer*, *Hard Target*, etc.], who's very good at giving an intense amount of character in the midst of action, and it's a whole different way of presenting a comic."

So important is the corrupt atmosphere of Bedlam to the story that Wolfman considers it pivotal. "The city is the second lead," he says. "As I was working up the plot, I was doing a map of Bedlam, and the history and every division of the city was vitally

The Man Called A•X Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marv Wolfman & Shawn McManus

The three keys to a successful adventure comic are action, action and action. *The Man Called A•X* has all that and more.

important. I knew its history, I knew it was put together by criminals and over the years the 12 gangs took over the major sections. There were major wars among the 12 gangs until they came to an uneasy truce a few years before our story begins. I knew what each gang leader in each section was in charge of—each had taken over different activities in the truce."

The collaborative process between Wolfman and McManus was straightforward.

"Shawn worked up some beautiful designs," he says. "Based on that, I took the concept of *A•X* and twisted it a little. Based on what I wrote, Shawn made further alterations in his designs. At that point, I wrote a tight plot, and Shawn asked me to pull it out a bit so he would have more freedom to portray the action. Even though I then wrote a lighter version of that plot and didn't choreograph every single scene, he still followed my original version, because all of the choreography is still there. If a character falls out of a helicopter, I don't have to say how—all I have to say is a gun blasts him out of a helicopter, and as he falls, he fires back up. How Shawn did it was purely up to him."

"This loose collaboration was fun," says McManus. "Marv gave me a lot of input and I gave him a lot of input about the character, as well. I asked Marv to write it in plot form, which he did, because I prefer working that way over a full script. We live pretty close, so we can have lunch together every now and then. I can drop stuff off with him, or he can drop stuff off at my studio, which makes it much easier."

One thing that excites Wolfman very much is his partner's artwork. "I always knew Shawn was good," he says. "I wanted to work with him, but I think he has pulled out all the stops on this one. It has power. The storytelling is so good that I don't have to write a lot of copy—everything is there! His figure work and dynamics are as good as or better than anyone else in the industry, just beyond belief! In all of those Image-like dynamics, though, I want to underscore his storytelling because it's so strong, and he's telling a dynamite story.

"When I saw Shawn's artwork for the first issue, it became an incredibly wonderful-looking comic—and I didn't even have to read the words!" says the writer. "This is one of the most beautiful, exciting comics I've seen in ages. I can't think of anyone who's doing better comic art at the moment!"

McManus says his style of art in *A•X* is what he has been working toward for a long time. "I've always wanted to do the superhero stuff, but I was never very good at it," he announces. "Looking at some of the Jim Lee and Rob Liefeld stuff showed me what I should have been doing all along."

The artist isn't sure exactly how to describe his current style, but says, "It's something I've been working towards. I guess I got pegged as a horror/comedy artist with a cartoony style, but that's all changing—for the better, in my opinion."

AX is the protagonist of the series, rather than the hero or anti-hero, say his creators. "He's the star of the book, and the character whom we will follow," Wolfman says. "Because I plotted all six issues as a novel, the change or 'arc' in the character is fully there. He's the one who undergoes all the change. After the original concept was done, I went back and added a female

"I wanted all of the characterization to come out through action; what a character does rather than what he *says*," explains writer Marv Wolfman.

All Art: Shawn McManus/Courtesy Malibu Comics

Artist Shawn McManus wanted a stylistic change. "Looking at some of the Jim Lee and Rob Liefeld stuff showed me what I should have been doing."

reporter, who is a very important character now."

There's a #0 issue of *A•X* less for sales reasons and more to provide a background for the city of Bedlam and the AX saga. "It couldn't be the series' first issue because it *doesn't* have the lead character in it," Wolfman reveals. "And, only when AX makes a certain discovery after the third issue can this all be told to readers."

The Man Called A•X encompasses many genres, but there is one it avoids. "It's an adventure series and a crime series, but it's *not* a superhero book," Wolfman says. "It's an action series featuring a character who must learn not only what he is, but *who* he is, and must take control over his own life."

Amnesia has been a relatively common device in TV, film and comic books for half-a-century, but Wolfman notes, "When you put them through that, you're forcing characters to face their life and try to come up with decisions that would be simple for them to make otherwise. AX has been altered in a fashion because he's taking bullets, being roasted, thrown out of helicopters, and he's surviving. This guy is not your normal CPA! By making him investigate who he really is, he is forced to make a moral deci-

He may not know who he is or where he came from, but AX *does* know how to dish out major league destruction.

Design & Layout: Freddy Callado

Garrison Gage is the man who runs the hell-hole city called Bedlam, and AX is a loose cannon running around in his town, so they're going to tangle.

sion about what goes on around him. That's why the amnesia device is very strong—you start a character with no moral guidepost or reason to be, who's just going through the motions—you force him to examine what he's doing."

However, this character isn't likely to do much internalizing, according to his creators. "Unlike other comics characters, AX isn't going to have long monologues about who he is," says Wolfman. "This is not soap opera or melodrama like many comics are, including other comics I have written, because I can also write melodramatic comics. This is straightforward action, SF, crime stuff. He's going to proceed through this stuff cleanly; he wants to find out what he is all about, but he isn't going to brood over it. He's a very positive, action-oriented character. I want him to face all of his decisions in motion.

"AX does what he needs to do, because frankly, he doesn't know why he's doing anything. The first issue is all reactive. He has to decide why he is doing what he's doing, and what it's all about. He has to make decisions as he's learning who he is, and as he faces the world around him."

McManus enjoys drawing the extensive action sequences required for *A•X*. "That's the stuff I've always wanted to do, but I either didn't get the scripts or I just wasn't good enough to do it," the artist says. "I'm actually consciously going after a more commercial style. It's the stuff I've always wanted to do, but I always thought I had a lot of weak points."

Veteran writer Wolfman is also taking some new approaches with the series. "This is the first time I've done a book structured so that everything comes out of action," he says. "I'm used to having characters who sit around and talk and bemoan, very much the old Marvel style. Many of us have been trapped in that style for many years. *The Man Called A•X* is very much a solid science fiction story which I've never done before—and it's a very strong character story told through action. The reader learns everything through the action, but there's an awful lot of information being given in a way that isn't obvious.

"Because it's the first time in seven or eight years that I'm editing my own material, it's a very strong story. This is exactly the way I would like to do it, without catering to anybody. I'm not aiming it at anyone but Shawn McManus and myself—we are deciding what *we* want to do."

(continued on page 58)

"AX is a character who finds himself in an incredibly violent world, and then must decide what he's going to do about it," says Wolfman.

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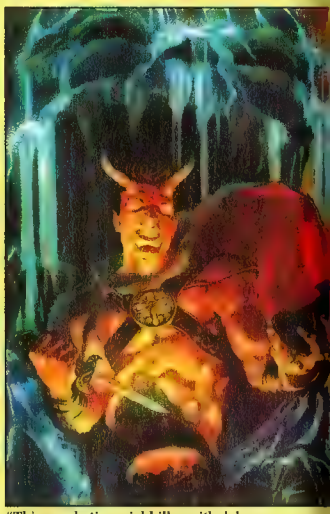
ASTONISHING ACTIONS

All Astonish Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment

The incredible Hulk re-teams with improbable allies Hank Pym and the Wasp to do combat with an old enemy who wears a new face.

Amazing readers yet again, Peter David chronicles a tale of classic heroes.

By DREW BITTNER



"This psychotic serial killer with delusions of godhood has those delusions fulfilled," says writer Peter David of his astonishing villain.

It's a brand new comic, a painted novel that recalls the beginning of the Marvel Age. It may seem new, but longtime comics fans are certain to remember the name from Marvel's past. *Tales to Astonish*, written by Peter David and fully painted by John Estes, re-creates those bygone days by reuniting the heroes from that long-ago comic, Hulk, Dr. Henry Pym and Janet Van Dyne against…Loki?

"It's a contemporary story, but it will be evocative of [Marvel's] history in that the Hulk, Dr. Pym and the Wasp are together again," says David. "The story emphasizes how far they've come since they first met in *Avengers* #1. They've grown up in 30 years.

"One thing I try to play against is the usual 'meet-and-fight' thing you see in every team-up. I'm going in a different direction—the first time they see each other, after all this time, the Hulk saves their butts! It's hard to launch into a gratuitous fight scene after that, so they sit, they talk and they realize that despite a rocky start [the Hulk left the team in *Avengers* #2 and fought them frequently afterward], they've come a long way."

All is not well, though, as a small-time criminal finds an ancient dagger imbued with the power of Loki. David says this parallel to Thor's origin tightens links to the original Avengers' team-up.

"In essence, this psychotic serial killer with delusions of godhood has those delusions fulfilled, which is never a good thing," he says. "He finds a dagger that holds the essence of Loki. He has lots of power put into his hands, and he uses it as destructively as Don Blake used the power of Thor constructively. It's up to the Hulk, Henry Pym and Janet Van Dyne to stop him. Sure, it could've been up to the Fantastic Four…but no. These three are stuck with it.

"Loki brought the original Avengers together [in *Avengers* #1], and that bit of Avengers history helps tie this story into that origin. I don't want to belabor the historical thing—longtime fans will enjoy the connection and the rest can skip over it. If you have to go back and explain, 'Well, see, way back when, Loki was running around…' then you've lost your audience with a history lesson."

All Art: John Estes

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

Hulk ... meister Peter David claims he took on the project because, "If anyone's going to screw up the Hulk, it's gonna be me."

These three characters, together with Iron Man and Thor, were the founders of Marvel's oldest ongoing superhero team. On that basis, David says he's proud to be working with this heroic trio.

"I've stripped away all the rust on these characters and gotten down to the roots, what I thought made them unique and special. Henry is a tradi-

(continued on page 60)

"Henry is a traditional scientist, mostly, being rational and intellectual," notes David of the once Ant- and later Giant-Man.

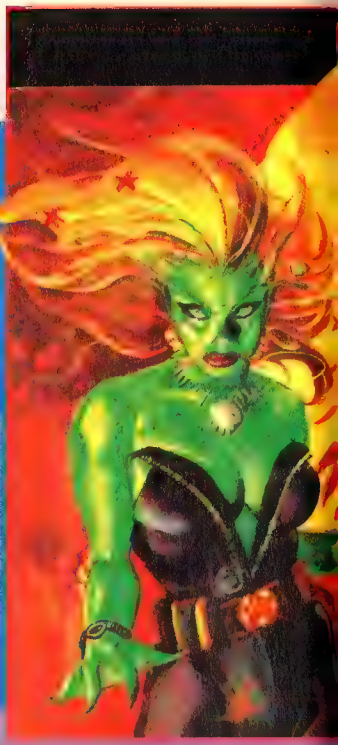
"They're all core founding members of the Marvel Universe. Just by virtue of being around for so long and surviving all that they have, going through so many permutations, they aren't second-stringers. It would be very presumptuous of me to look down my nose at Dr. Pym and the Wasp.

"Janet is a flake," notes David, but she and Pym hold a place of honor, having been present from the early days of the Marvel Universe.

TALES OF DOC HORROR

"World's Finest" painter Daniel Brereton turns models into monsters for "The Nocturnals."

"One of the reasons I do the stuff I do is to deal with my fears and anxieties," reveals Brereton.



Let's get this out of the way right now: Daniel Brereton uses reference materials. Models, photographs, you name it. Even if painting a gunsel who looks like a fish, Brereton will base the figure on a picture he has taken of one of his friends, twisted into a heroic or dastardly stance.

Anybody got a problem with that? Apparently, yes—at least according to Brereton. Fans, it seems, put artists who work from photographs in the same camp with athletes who use steroids.

"There is a stigma," says Brereton. "If you use reference, you're *cheating*."

Deal with it, people: Lots of artists use reference, and not because they don't know their anatomy. Brereton, for instance, could deliver a lecture on the nuances of the human face. "There are temperature changes and color changes in every person's face," he says. "You have more blood vessels in your nose, around your eyes, in your ears, and it makes those areas redder." Photos of models, he insists, allow him to get light effects and shadow patterns right. "When you fake 'em, they *look* faked," he declares. "Photos don't lie."

References notwithstanding, Brereton's work is a far cry from photorealism. Rather, he brings the hot-blooded roar of classic pulp covers and dime novels to comics. No one has rendered Superman and Batman, those champions of decency, as downright *luridly* as Brereton did in the recent *Legends of the World's Finest*.

Now he's turning his friends into monsters for *The Nocturnals*, set to begin early next year. Brereton will write and draw this six-issue series in the creator-owned Bravura line, published by Malibu Comics. Get ready to walk through a world of reptile-men, gargoyles, were-things and bio-engineered whatsits, each looking as though it had dropped by Brereton's studio for a sitting.

"My stuff is so out there, it needs the structure from references to hold it down," Brereton says. "If you get that realism in there, it lends the work a lot of credibility."

Realism is at the heart of Brereton's approach to his painting, but not at the heart of the story he has concocted for *The Nocturnals*. Just doing a head count of all the monsters in this book could wear a person out.

The Nocturnals include Komodo, the dragon boy. Polychrome, an oft-invisible ectomorph. The Gunwitch, sort of a scarecrow with six-guns. Starfish, a sexy amphibian. Firelion, a pyrokinetic samurai.

And these are the *good guys*. In the other corner are the Zampa Family, a mob organization, and the Crim, an evil alien race. Not to mention the Raccoon, a gene-spliced hybrid, and his vigilante group, the Freelynchers.

Standing tall in this murderous maelstrom is Doc Horror, the rumor-soaked chief of the Nocturnals. He's a chemist, warlock, genius, possible vampire, mob fixer and physician—just the kind of success story everyone hates at their high school reunion. Not that Doc's perfect: He failed to prevent the Crim from destroying his world, while he escaped to Earth.

Pretty much everybody is after Doc as *The Nocturnals* begins. Mob boss Tony Zampa wants him dead, as do the Crim. The Raccoon wants to rule the mobs, which entails taking on Doc.

All Art: Dan Brereton

All Batman, Superman & Associated Characters & Art Trademark & Copyright 1994 DC Comics

Spooky has never been a word you would use to describe Superman, until Brereton got ahold of him in *Legends of the World's Finest*, that is.

"You could say *The Nocturnals* is about an inhuman band of outlaws hunted by the criminal underground," says writer/artist Dan Brereton.

And Narn K, your one-stop bio-engineering shop, wants to stop Doc from liberating its experiments.

"You could say *The Nocturnals* is about an inhuman band of outlaws hunted by the criminal underground," says Brereton, trying to summarize his sprawling storyline. Listening to the somewhat manic artist, who digresses with each breath, it's easy to see how the plot got a little out of control.

The Nocturnals developed around Doc Horror, whom Brereton first sketched in 1992 while on an airplane to the Glasgow Comic Art Convention. The "Doc," Brereton adds, *isn't* an homage to pulp superstar Doc Savage, nor to Michael T. Gilbert's comic character Doc Stearn, Mr. Monster. "It's one of the archetypes of crime fiction," Brereton explains. "If a gang leader was smart, they would give him the name 'Doc'—like Doc McCoy in Jim Thompson's *The Getaway*."

Doc bears a striking resemblance to

A friend of Brereton's was used as a model for Doc Horror, but from this self-portrait, it looks like there's a little of Dan in the Doc, and vice versa.

the lead of 1990's *The Black Terror*, Brereton's first painted comic series. "It's like the same actor is the Black Terror and Doc Horror," says Brereton. "I like the way [director] Akira Kurosawa always used Toshiro Mifune, or [playwright/director] David Mamet uses Joe Mantegna to play a certain kind of character. Doc's my Joe Mantegna."

Another familiar face belongs to Doc's daughter, the spooky Halloween Girl. She looks exactly like the girl in *Legends of the World's Finest*, and both are dead ringers for Lindsay, Brereton's eldest daughter. Now eight, Lindsay modeled for both characters, and directly inspired her *Nocturnals* lookalike.

"When she was four," Brereton explains, "she said, 'Dad, you know what I want to be for Halloween? I want to be Halloween Girl.' I thought that was a cool name, like something for a *Legion of Super-Heroes* character."

With *The Nocturnals*, Brereton has blenderized two of his favorite fiction genres, crime and horror. "My major influences all stem from the pulps," he admits. He's addicted to crime authors like Thompson, James Ellroy, David Goodis, Charles Willeford, the whole Black Lizard tough-guy gang. Nearly all of Brereton's work displays this fondness for *noir* characters—even the Superman he painted for *Legends of the World's Finest* looked like he had spent the night chugging rotgut and feeling existential.

As for horror, we're talking first loves here. "When I was a kid, the monsters I created on paper were my friends when I didn't *have* any friends," Brereton says. He devoured the stories of H.P. Lovecraft, and while in his high school leadership class, Brereton tried to talk the administration into screening *Creature from the Black Lagoon*—in the original 3-D, of course.

Today, monsters dominate the room in Brereton's Northern California home that serves as his studio, a room that looks like a Toys 'R' Us exploded *Aliens* figurines, Godzilla models and swarms of other toys overwhelm the books and stacks of magazines Brereton uses for reference. A Bride of Frankenstein model at his left shoulder, plastic alligators on the drawing table, Brereton works the graveyard shift because "it would be very hard to do a story about the Nocturnals in the daylight."

Despite his obsessions with night-crawlers and ne'er-do-wells, Brereton hasn't forgotten what it's like to be scared. Whereas his young daughters have shrugged off *ALIENS*, Brereton recalls turning off the TV as a kid in order to avoid unnerving commercials for the films *Magic* and *The Shining*. And nothing creeped him out like the lopsided mug of Alfred E. Neuman, grinning out from every issue of *Mad*.

"I was afraid of the dark—I still am to a certain extent," Brereton admits. "One of the reasons I do the stuff I do is that I'm working out fears and anxieties."

Brereton keeps in touch with his early fears *and* his early fantasies, which he's now happily living out. "When I was eight or nine," he recalls, "I used to send character drawings to Marvel and say, 'Here's a character—you can go ahead and use it. And maybe you guys could find a drawing that John Buscema or Gene Colan threw away and fish it out of the trash for me.' "

He adored Marvel comics, and wanted to draw them for a living, but was sure he would never ink well enough. "I couldn't put pen or brush to

"If you get that realism in there, it lends the work a lot of credibility," notes Brereton, who created this capital-T tough Sergeant Rock illustration.

paper to save my life," he says.

Later, at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland and the Academy of Art College in San Francisco, he learned the art of the brush. His studies also supplemented his love for guys like Frank Frazetta, Berni Wrightson and Jack Kirby with an admiration of other kinds of artists, such as N.C. Wyeth, Dean Cornwell and Gustav Klimt.

Still, comics haunted him. He remembers a momentous day in teacher/artist Vince Perez's "Art As Illustration" class at the California College of Arts and Crafts circa 1987. "I was 21, and these two guys in their late 20s came in and were walking around looking at everyone's work," Brereton recalls. "They turned out to be Mike Mignola and Steve Purcell." Mignola later told Brereton, "You were the only one whose work still looked good up close."

"She said, 'I want to be Halloween Girl.' I thought it was a cool name," explains Brereton of his daughter Lindsay's transformation into a Nocturnal.

"It was unique, exciting and had a lot of really nice drawing—not the usual art-school BS," says Mignola. "And it was *so* energetic, as is Dan." Brereton, somewhat starstruck, began hanging around the apartment building where Mignola, Purcell and Art Adams lived, pencilling sample pages for Mignola to (ruthlessly) critique.

At Wonder Con the next spring, Eclipse gave Brereton his first assignment, a pencilling job on writer Kurt Busiek's backup stories for *Merchants of Death*. "They were mildly unimpressed," Brereton says. Then, at the 1988 San Diego Comic Convention, Brereton got his first glimpse of Dave McKean's painted work for *Black Orchid*, and of Kent Williams' painted *Blood* book. Their work stunned him.

"I went home a day early, I was so depressed," he says. "I thought, 'I'll *never* be any good.' "

The following semester, he did a painted comic story based on the Golden Age Black Terror character as a homework assignment. He showed the pages to editor Fred Burke at Eclipse, knowing the company had talked about reviving the Black Terror. Eclipse signed him on.

"By the time I left the Academy, I was doing *The Black Terror* instead of my homework," Brereton says. "I think I failed one class because of the book."

Neither this book nor his next projects—*The Psycho* for DC (CS #21), an adaptation of Clive Barker's *Dread* and a host of covers—lifted Brereton's profile. He got more attention from the 15 entries he did for the Fleer Ultra X-Men trading cards. The cards brought Brereton fan mail—"One kid told me, 'Your muscle buildup is really good,' —but well into 1992, Brereton was still a virtual unknown.

That's when the three-issue *Legends of the World's Finest* series, written by Walt Simonson, slingshot Brereton into fan consciousness. Brereton says many readers saw *World's Finest* and asked, "Where have you been?"

The project happened because, Brereton says, "I wanted to do Batman and [DC executive editor] Mike Carlin wanted me to do Superman." DC placed no restrictions on his approach, Brereton says, beyond denying his request to put pouches on Batman's utility belt: "They said I had to stick with the current costume."

A simple thumbnail sketch on a Post-It note is the first step of the long, complex creative process for Brereton.

World's Finest was Brereton's most traditional comic to date, but it threw into stark relief the differences between Brereton and other comics painters. Unlike McKean or Bill Sienkiewicz, he doesn't stray into abstraction. And his approach is miles from the more realistic, subdued work of Alex Ross, seen in *Marvels* (CS #39).

Rather, Brereton's paintings exude the savage gusto of a *Shadow* or *Weird Tales* cover. His heroes are both lifelike and larger-than-life, their five o'clock shadow graying jaws the size of Minnesota.

"Men have a different color in this

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos

Brereton's the kind of guy who picks up road kill for photo reference, so is it any wonder he draws creeps like these with such gusto?

area of their face," offers Brereton, defending his resolutely grizzled males. "Look at Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble."

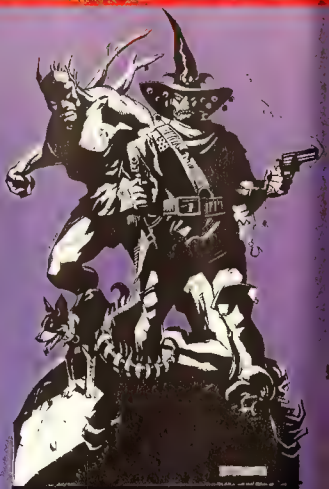
Brereton's artistic process starts with thumbnails, which he scribbles on 4-1/4"-square Post-It Notes. Each note represents a single page, and includes suggested poses for the lead characters in each panel.

Then, it's camera time. Brereton poses his friends and family like the drawings, selecting people whose overall physique comes closest to the characters involved. His friend Brett Rector, for example, was Batman and Superman, as well as Doc Horror, Gunwitch and other characters in *The Nocturnals*.

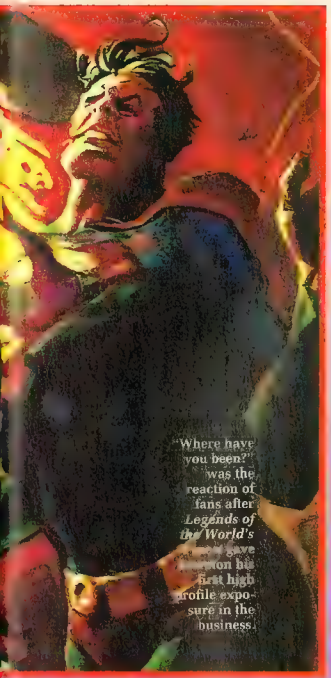
"I use myself for the fat, unsavory, slimeball characters," Brereton says. "I couldn't use anyone else to do it. In *The Nocturnals* #1, I'm one of the mobsters, Freddie the Owl—well, I'm all three of them really, but only he resembles me."

Pictures in hand, Brereton does a rough sketch of each panel, then dips into the Mickey Mouse lunchbox that holds his tubes of watercolors, mostly Windsor Newtons. Often, he begins with a base color—a wash applied underneath an entire composition, which brings the picture's colors into a unified scheme. For an idea of how this works, compare the blue of Superman's costume on the second two *World's Finest* covers, which had orange and green base color, respectively.

"I start painting with a large 1"



The influence of early Brereton supporter Mike Mignola is visible in this drawing of Komodo and The Gunwitch (with Mojo the dog) from *Nocturnals*.



"Where have you been?" was the reaction of fans after *Legends of the World's* gave on his first high profile exposure in the business.

brush," he says. "That way I don't noodle and noodle at the beginning. I do as much as I can with that, then stop and move to smaller brushes, all the way down to a #0, #1 or #2 for the smaller details."

The downside of painting comics this way is time. The only way Brereton's comics can come out monthly or bi-monthly is if the publishers stockpile issues until he's finished with a run. "The three 48-page issues of *World's Finest*," Brereton says by way of example, "represent a year's work for me."

His slow approach means that, to make a scheduled ship date of early 1995 for *The Nocturnals* #1, Brereton had to start painting in December 1993. He also had to clear his slate of other projects, which means writer James Robinson is still waiting for Brereton to finish pencilling his *Legends of the Dark Knight* one-shot, to be inked by Timothy Bradstreet. And the Cable comic that Brereton and Fabian Nicieza wanted to do is on the back burner. Brereton would also like to do a Batman story with Howard Chaykin scripting—don't hold your breath.

But Brereton doesn't mind focusing on *The Nocturnals*, a book he says he could do "for the rest of my career." And he's clearly glad to be in the Bravura dugout, even though he knows he's the roster's rookie. At the press conference announcing Bravura, surrounded by his new colleagues—elder statesmen like Chaykin, Simonson, Jim Starlin and Gil Kane—Brereton joked, "I feel like I need a booster seat."

Being in this prestigious company has its definite pluses. Brereton has already tapped Chaykin to be his "creative rabbi," after Chaykin reviewed the plot of *The Nocturnals*.

"My primary directive to Dan was to fall out of love with the material," Chaykin says. "There was much too much: too many characters, too many plotlines. Much of it was in the service of, 'I feel like drawing this.' As an artist moving into writing, you have to stop thinking about what you *want* to draw and start thinking about what you *need* to draw."

Chaykin recommended Brereton bone up on script structure by reading Syd Field's guide *Screenplay*. He also got Brereton to start plotting on index cards, "but I got mad at how big the ones he's using are. I wanted him to use smaller ones, because his tendency is to put *everything* on there."

With this help, Brereton hopes to have shaped *The Nocturnals* into something digestible, although readers may still find it chewy going at first. "It doesn't start with the origin of the characters," Brereton says. "I'm not interested in the origin. I'm interested in jumping into a story where things have been going on for awhile.

"I like the idea that things are going on under our noses. While I'm working at night, nocturnal animals are roaming around, feeding, having lives that never touch ours."

Brereton hopes to bring a little mysterious nightlife home to readers with *The Nocturnals*. He has already brought some of it to his own home.

"I pulled a dead raccoon off the side of the road so I could have reference for the Raccoon," Brereton says. "I put him in a plastic bag, brought him home, photographed him and then buried him. A group of raccoons came the next night and dug him up."

Lovecraft would have been proud. CS

Film noir, hardboiled detective fiction, horror movies, monsters, old comics, aspects of all these influences are visible in Brereton's work.

Firearm & Prime Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Malibu Comics

STRANGE STORYTELLING

Paying tribute to a bygone age, Kurt Busiek spins a tale of marvels.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

There are tales and then there are *Strange Tales*, Kurt Busiek and Ricardo Villagran's ode to Marvel's classic past.

The *original* gang's all here as *Strange Tales* celebrates one of Marvel Comics' founding titles. Dr. Strange, the Human Torch, the Thing and even S.H.I.E.L.D. superspy Nick Fury—all heroes who had memorable runs in the classic *Strange Tales*—are joining forces to battle the *strangest* monsters in years in this fully painted look back at the Silver Age of comics.

Writer Kurt (*Marvels*) Busiek and painter Ricardo (*Conan*) Villagran have teamed up for *Strange Tales* (on sale in November). This one-shot graphic novel takes place in the present as it looks back on the past.

"It's all about storytelling and the power of belief," explains Busiek. "Nick Fury, the Human Torch and the Thing are sitting around in Fantastic Four headquarters playing poker and swapping stories.

"Most of the book is the story told by the Thing, a recent adventure in which he and the Torch went off to the Keewazi reservation at the request of their old friend—and current Keewazi chief—Wyatt Wingfoot. A folk tale has apparently come to life and is stealing Keewazi children. The folk tale is nothing more than a myth, it's something some Keewazi mom came up with to scare her kids, but now it's apparently real.

"Over the course of the Thing and the Torch's investigation, they recall an adventure that took place in the early years of their career, when their

Busiek takes the idea of storytelling as his theme and here brings one to life. "It's something some Keewazi mom came up with to scare her kids," he says.

"I loved the feeling of that hi-tech world with this brawny, visceral guy," notes Busiek, who features Nick Fury in one of his interlocking tales.

series would have been running in *Strange Tales*. Dr. Strange gets involved, and remembers an adventure that happened to *him* back when his series was running in *Strange Tales*. Wyatt Wingfoot tells a story that his grandfather told him that harks back to the pre-superhero, monster days of *Strange Tales*, and we even go so far as to have a story that's part of the Keewazi creation myth of the origin of the universe! It all actually ties together, ultimately involving the villains from each of these stories re-appearing in modern day. Why they're doing that is the crux of the story."

There are many tales to be told within the 64-page painted book, but only one person is confused by it all. "Everybody in this book gets to tell a story at some point," explains Busiek. "[Letterer] Richard Starkings is going crazy, because of the different punctuation required—for the main narration, for somebody telling a story within the main narration, and somebody telling a story *within* a story *within* that main narration! Occasionally, it even dips into four levels! So, it gets complicated."

Inevitably, there will be comparisons to Busiek's work on *Marvels* (CS #39), which also re-created the past, but Busiek says *Strange Tales* is different, even as it pays homage to the Silver Age.

"I'm sure Marvel would be happy if I said, 'It's just like *Marvels*!' " says Busiek. "It's *not*, but it has some similarities in that it's concerned with the past and with re-creating the flavor of those old adventures, while at the same time feeding it into a modern story that has a great deal of thought behind it."

The original *Strange Tales* featured the Marvel heroes least likely to share adventures together, but Busiek was determined to develop a tale that included them all, so as to suggest the early stories. "I think the Torch and

All Strange Tales Art: Ricardo Villagran

Busiek's goal was "re-creating the flavor of those old adventures, while at the same time feeding it into a modern story.

Thing and Dr. Strange may have met *once*, but I figured if I was supposed to be doing a celebration of *Strange Tales*, then we might as well celebrate it!" laughs Busiek. "Instead of doing a story that features these characters, let's do one featuring these characters that has *something* more to it than 'They were all in the same book to-

(continued on page 62)

All Strange Characters Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

The stories-within-stories structure allows Busiek to conjure up the different flavors of *Tales*' past, from goofy, to eerie, to hi-tech.

SPIDER-MAN

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Once again, the wall-crawler swings into animated adventure.

Peter Parker, the Amazing Spider-Man, has faced many problems in his life. Hated by a skeptical public, the guilt-ridden crimefighter juggles a double life, a college career, friends, family and an endless stream of cruel and unusual enemies.

Television has proven to be deadlier than Venom or Mysterio. With the exception of a 1960s cartoon with a catchy theme song ("Can he swing from a web?/Take a look overhead!"), most TV adaptations turned the web-spinner into a bland, bug-eyed cheerleader saddled with not-so-Amazing Friends, dull plots and guest stars like Swarm.

This is about to change with Fox Television's *Spider-Man*, a 65-episode animated series capturing all aspects of the comic-book life of the hero created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko.

Photo: Pat Jankiewicz

Spidey's fate rests in the hands of one man: John Semper. In his office at Marvel Films Animation, the tall, eloquent Semper looks more like an expensive Beverly Hills attorney than a superhero. He's betrayed only by his Spider-Man wristwatch ("One of three that I own," he laughs), a comic-book rack crammed with Spider-books in the center of the room and an inflatable Spidey clinging precariously to the wall.

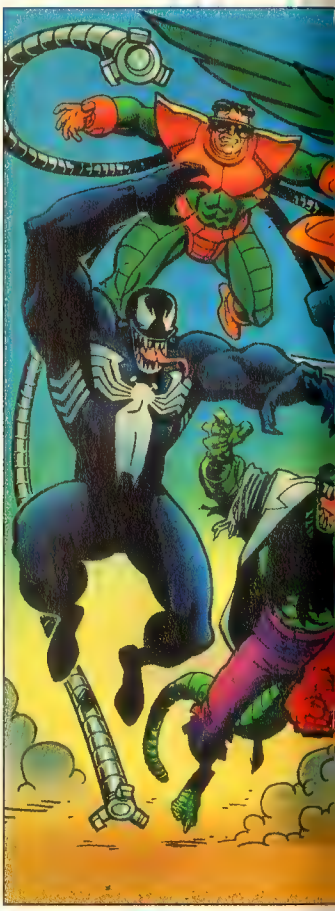
Semper wears three hats on this series, serving simultaneously as producer, story editor and writer. His goal is simple. "I wanted to do a show that took all of the comic book's elements, scrambled them up and kept it relatively the same, but different!

"Our Peter Parker is a teenager who's already Spider-Man. He has only had his spider powers for a few years. Peter can tend to be a pretty dour character if you let him, because he's going through a lot of turmoil in his life. Everybody goes through those times, especially when you're a teenager.

"We've had Peter Parker quit being Spider-Man a lot; this isn't going to be a series where somebody is prancing around thrilled and happy to be a superhero. Peter frequently says, 'Spider-Man no more!' because Spidey brings Peter many faults, concerns and insecurities."

Unlike some other costumed heroes, Spider-

"It's good drama," says producer/story editor John Semper, "we're doing *Playhouse 90* meets *Beverly Hills, 90210* meets *Spider-Man*."



Man also has a sense of humor. "I love that comedic aspect; I said in my writer's guide, 'When he hasn't got the mask on, Peter never quips verbally—but he does quip in his head.' When he has the mask on, it's the exact opposite—he hardly ever quips in his mind when he can quip out loud. You reverse the use of voice-over.

"Spider-Man is very deceptive. The reason this is the toughest animation show on the planet is that there's something about Spidey that, ideally, works best in comics form. Once you translate him to three-dimensional motion as written in the comics, he starts to fall apart a little bit. Some of the inherent conceits start to gnaw at you; like, 'Why does this guy talk to himself so damn much?'

"You can't get enough of that in the comics, but the minute you get a character endlessly philosophizing in a constant interior monologue, you're in trouble! It's not gonna make for great television. Right away, something inherent in the comics has to be redone in a way that works for TV. Spidey's the Hamlet of Saturday morning.

"Almost all of the stories start with me. I never thought I would say this, but 65 episodes aren't enough! I just ate up 13 episodes essentially doing one story, a 13-episode arc for season two. It's like a mini-series. We have drama, action, guest stars and I could easily have done twice as much—there's not enough room. We're cramming so much good stuff into the series, it *has* to be a hit!"

Semper feels it will work because "It's good drama. We're not doing cartoons, we're doing *Playhouse 90* meets *Beverly Hills, 90210* meets *Spider-Man*. We have a great cast, money's no object and we have TMS doing the animation! They're doing the best job they can because they're financial partners with us on this show.

"I told my writers, 'Pretend we're doing Jim Cameron's movie. Pretend Cameron found out he's not doing a movie but a gigantic mini-series. He can do whatever he wants, but he's so overwhelmed he's called upon you guys to be the writers and you each have a half hour.' "

Animated Spider-Man Art & Model Sheets: Courtesy John Semper/Marvel Productions

Art: Ty Templeton/Paul Mounts Design & Layout: Jim McLarnon

Semper is keeping the web-spinner's problem-plagued life as part of the show. "That's what makes the guy appeal to everyone," he confirms. "I would wander through this building and when people found out I was the producer on *Spider-Man*, they would say, 'I hope you're gonna do that soap opera stuff and have him really worrying about things!' That's what everybody wants to see and the one thing they've never done in any previous adaptation!

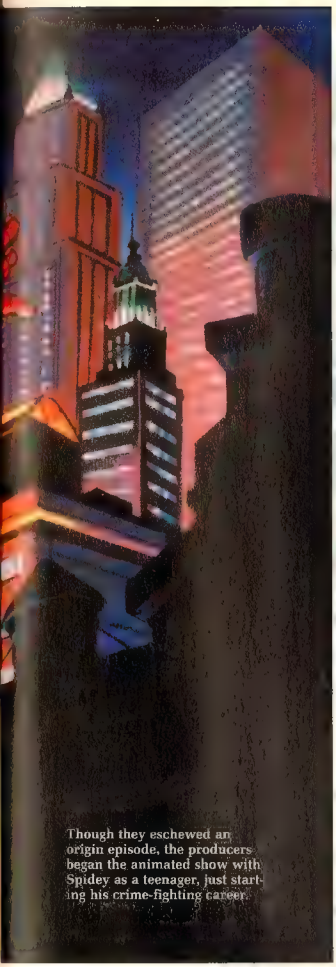
"I wanted to get heavily into the soap opera aspects. We do it a little bit in the first season, but we weren't guaranteed we could air the episodes in a certain order, so in the second season, I'm doing a 13-episode arc. It's tough to do on Saturday mornings, because Saturday morning is supposed to be action, action, action."

Spidey's friends and foes are brought to life by a number of famous actors. "I love the cast," the producer says proudly. "We have so many cool actors on this show, I'm doing it just to meet all these people! Chris [*The Little Mermaid*] Barnes is great as Peter Parker and Spidey. Chris is a talented guy who's gonna do big things. He's Greg in *The Brady Bunch Movie* and I now have to watch *Starman* every week to see his past work!

"It's funny; Chris is Peter Parker and over at the *Marvel Action Hour*, we have Robert Hays as Iron Man—they were together on *Starman*! They ask about each other all the time.

"Saratoga Ballantine is Mary Jane Watson; she's sweet and incredibly talented. I'm having fun writing for her. We also have a terrific voice director, Tony Caster.

"I had the opportunity to meet Mar-



Though they eschewed an origin episode, the producers began the animated show with Spidey as a teenager, just starting his crime-fighting career.

tin Landau, who's voicing the Scorpion. We also have Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. as Dr. Octopus. Joe Campanella is both the Lizard and Curt Connors. He'll be in all of our shows because Curt Connors is a major character, a professor at Empire State University. We have ESU [Spidey's alma mater] and we even have the Coffee Bean," Semper chuckles. "We're doing the *Spider-Man* that I fell in love with, with elements of the newer one!"

Spidey's perpetually angry employer, *Daily Bugle* publisher J. Jonah Jameson, gets a makeover in the series.

J. Jonah Jameson (*sans* cigar) has the voice of Ed Asner as well as a new multi-media conglomerate and a new motivation for hating Spidey.

J. JONAH JAMESON

"Jonah is like Ted Turner—he has a huge multimedia conglomerate. Ed Asner is J. Jonah Jameson. It's fun to hang out with him. I was a little in awe of Ed when I first met him, but he's a nice person.

"I made Jonah a credible character. In every previous animated version, Jonah has been reduced to banging his fist on the table, yelling, 'Parker!' He's this dumb, Adolph Hitler-esque caricature. I've given him a real reason for not liking Spider-Man, which has never appeared in the comic. You always know you've done something right when you say, 'I've done this with J. Jonah,' and Marvel Comics Editor-in-Chief Tom DeFalco goes, 'Wow! I never thought of that!' "

In the comics, Jameson's hatred of Spidey stems from the fact that he's secretly jealous of him. "The jealousy thing always played pretty two-dimensional to me. I talked it over with Stan Lee and he said, 'You know, I never thought of a better reason.' In the Scorpion episode, we reveal that J. Jonah has a reason in his past for not liking men who wear masks and take the law into their own hands. He has a genuine reason, which makes Jonah a credible character, not a guy who stupidly and unmotivatedly hates Spider-Man.

"When you have Ed Asner playing J. Jonah Jameson, you have to make him a real human being, otherwise it's a waste of Ed Asner. We have a zillion cartoon voices out there who could yell, 'Parker!' but when you have Ed Asner, you have to give him some drama.

"J. Jonah really is on a mission—he feels vigilantes are a problem and he may not be wrong. There's a lot of interesting interplay between him and Spider-Man. There's fun stuff, too, like webbing Jameson to the ceiling! It's all there."

One casualty of the comic-to-TV translation is Jameson's trademark cigars. "We say, 'He just quit smoking,' because you can't have anyone smoke on Saturday morning. There's always a credible way around any limitation."

Semper explains. "If Jonah just quit smoking, he's crankier than ever. Instead of saying, 'He doesn't smoke,' which wouldn't be true to the story, you say, 'He just quit,' and suddenly everything fits into place."

"I love the cast," Semper raves. Chris Barnes stars as Peter Parker/Spider-Man and Saratoga Ballantine voices Mary Jane Watson.

Photo: Lisa Ozzi

Daily Bugle City Editor Joe "Robbie" Robertson will also appear. "Rodney Salisbury, a talented, young black actor, plays Robbie. As J. Jonah is a man on a mission, Robbie has a wider view of everything that's happening."

Viewers can look forward to meeting the love of Spidey's life, Mary Jane Watson. "The Mary Jane we're doing is a very likable character. We're doing some things with Mary Jane to make her a lovable, interesting character and a strong woman. She's a college student/aspiring actress/model. We even do her first appearance, the 'Face it, Tiger—You just hit the jackpot!' scene," he laughs. "We also have the bit where Peter tries to avoid meeting her.

"I really wanted some interesting female characters because Spider-Man's universe has never really been populated with very powerful women. We have [Jameson's secretary] Glory Grant, played by Nell Carter, Betty Brant, Liz Allen and Debra Whitman, for anyone who knows who Debra Whitman is![A bright, neurotic college girl friend of Peter Parker who has a nervous breakdown in the comics.] My Debra Whitman is strong, with a great deal of intelligence. She's Peter's intellectual equal."

One familiar face missing from the cartoon series is Peter Parker's deceased girl friend Gwen Stacy. "We're not having Gwen in our series, which might outrage some people," Semper states. "I didn't want audiences falling in love with a dead character. The big problem with Gwen, other than the fact that everybody will know that she has to die, is that Gwen is an old character who hasn't appeared in the comics in years. As a reader, I loved Gwen Stacy many years ago—I loved Gwen a little more than I liked Mary Jane!

"I used Felicia Hardy—one of the few really strong woman characters in the Spidey universe, and made her a variation on Gwen. She's her own character, but she fills the 'Gwen Stacy gap.' There are surprises now, because you don't know what we're gonna do with Felicia Hardy," Semper smiles. "That's what I want; I want people to tune in and say, 'Where is this going?' because then I can start having fun!"

Art: John Romita

Semper hopes to forge a bond between audience and hero, following Spidey's ups and downs in life, like the comic's early issues.

Felicia is now an heiress living with her wealthy mother, played by Rue McClanahan. "When we did Dr. Octopus, we had a variation on his origin where he gets involved in kidnapping Felicia—her mother's Hardy Foundation is responsible for what happened to him by not giving him grant money. We tie in many of the characters."

As fans know, Felicia Hardy becomes the masked criminal Black Cat. "We're doing Felicia, not the Black Cat," he clarifies. "But she has been so successful in the show, it's not out of the question. We're not doing it real soon because we haven't gotten all the fun out of having her just be Felicia."

Of course, the show would be nothing without the grande dame of Spidey's life, May Parker. "We definitely have Aunt May, but I'm not doing 'the heart thing' because I think we're all tired of that," Semper shrugs. "It's Aunt May without the heart attacks all the time, and we've cleaned her up a bit visually; she's a little more attractive than the old crone [in the comics]. Aunt May is remarkably consistent, largely because of the way that Stan sees her."

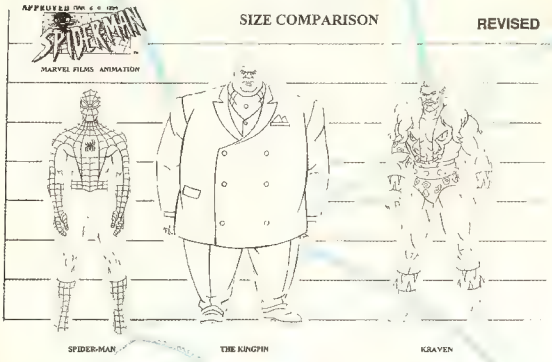
As for the many deadly foes of Spider-Man, the web-slinger will have his hands full. "We have Roscoe Lee Browne as the Kingpin. Kingpin is an extremely important character to us, because he is *the* major villain. He turns up in most of our episodes, if not all of them. Kingpin is great fun to write—I've turned him into Professor Moriarty, the evil behind *all* the other evil.

"We've also made him into a bigger, more sinister and more global character. In the comics, Kingpin is more urban and very New York-centered. We felt that in order to make this guy into someone truly, magnificently evil, he needed to be much more global—a real major force in crime around the world. He's quite sinister now. In the season I'm writing now, we'll also have Vanessa, his wife.

"Mark Hamill gives a tremendous performance as the Hobgoblin. I'm very happy to have Mark on this show. We've tinkered with the whole Green Goblin and Hobgoblin thing. People are gonna be shocked and will probably hate me, but if they bear with us, we're coming at it from an approach that'll have more surprises than if we simply did a direct translation of the [comic book] Goblin saga.

"We have Norman Osborn, who's done by a wonderful voice actor named Nelson Ross. We have Norman before he becomes the Goblin and his son Harry—Peter Parker's best friend. Norman will become the Goblin, but we're gonna throw some surprises at you. We have the Hobgoblin, but you won't know who it is. You'll just have to watch the show," he smiles.

"We're gonna do the whole Green Goblin story at some point. It'll take a



The Kingpin is an even *bigger* threat to Spider-Man in the series, and not just size-wise. His crime empire not only spreads over New York, but across the globe.

"That's what *Spider-Man* is all about, the audience falling in love with the character and experiencing his life," explains Semper.

lot of episodes, but we'll do him, because the Green Goblin is a very important part of the Spider-Man saga.

"The Spider-Slayers are going to be there; I have them try to slay Spider-Man," Semper laughs. "Spencer, Alistair Smythe and Kingpin are all involved, as well as Eddie Brock. Everyone's involved with the Spider-Slayers. To me, the 'Spider-Slayers' episodes were a creative high point. I got to do *exactly* what I wanted in terms of storytelling: epic stories with interesting characters and a little bit of a romantic twist for Peter.

"Our second season is a wonderful epic arc of mixed emotional conflicts and villainous conflicts. We have Kraven the Hunter, Hydro Man, Shocker, the Vulture—in his young incarnation—and the Chameleon. We've got Eddie Brock and you know that if Eddie Brock's there, he's gearing towards becoming Venom.

"Eddie Brock and Venom are just the way you would expect them to be. Hank Azzaria—the voice of Moe, Chief Wiggums and Apu on *The Simpsons*—does a great Eddie Brock and Venom. Hank *is* Eddie Brock," the writer chuckles. "He always comes in looking like he's ready to fight!"

If Venom is present, can Carnage be far behind? "Carnage isn't here right away, but Carnage *will* happen, I can promise you that," Semper declares. "I can't tell you when. We have so much ground to cover. I have the entire Marvel Universe at my disposal and I'm putting people in this show who have never been animated before. We're even doing Morbius, the Living Vampire on the show!"

As comics fans have known for 30 years, viewers will learn that "with great power also comes great responsibility." "Spidey's origin has been incorporated into two episodes where it's told in flashback. We don't do an 'origin episode' because it's one of those things we've all seen a lot, like the origin of the Hulk, everyone can recite it by heart," he jokes. "To devote 22 minutes to it would be 22 *wasted* minutes. In the second season, we find out aspects of the origin we've never known before.

"One high point that I came up with was the webbing. It always bothered me that this kid, that a science student, could invent this brilliant web fluid. I thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool if the spider that gave him his powers also enabled him to come up with this formula?' It's part of what got transferred by the spider bite. Because a spider inherently knows how to make this stuff, so does Spider-Man. Many brilliant *scientists*, let alone students, don't know how to make webbing!"

When Semper adapts stories from the comics (such as the tales in which Spidey grows four extra arms), he's careful to put a fresh spin on them. "I didn't want to do 'Spidey's greatest hits,' where you tune in to the episode, and within five minutes, you say, 'Oh yeah—this is the one where Spidey does this.' People who like Spider-Man will discover we're true to the character, but we're not telling stories they're already familiar with. We're telling *new* stories.

"I read the comics to find my stories. I spend long weekends going through 20 or 30 comics looking for the stories I want to tell. I want to do a Puma story, so there are a ton of Puma stories I've got to read, photocopy and hand off to a writing team. Then, we have to figure out how to take Puma, whose story spans over 30 comics, and turn it into a good two- or three-parter. Spidey doesn't work so well in one-parters, because you can't really do complex stories."

Fans can tell they've updated the show for the '90s. The Vulture has armor and one of those open-mouth screaming expressions.

As for the villains' origins, "We have Scorpion and the story of how J. Jonah Jameson gets involved in creating that character. Jonah wants Scorpion to rival Spider-Man as a hero, but he turns villainous. We do the Lizard, which is pretty traditional. Many of the first 13 episodes are pretty much versions of the comics.

"Many of the origins are very thin, so there's a tremendous amount of room to add without changing them. You can still have Doc Ock gain his metallic arms in an explosion, but you can add to the original storyline and that's all that we've done.

"Dr. Octopus was the story that Stan had the greatest amount of influence in terms of retelling. There were two stories that Stan and our executive producer Avi Arad had a heavy hand in—one was 'Dr. Octopus' and the other was 'Venom' part one. I outlined 'Venom' one, two and three, but when it came to do part one, Avi and Stan came in." Thanks to their input, the alien symbiote now reaches Earth by clinging to a crashing space shuttle.

"We brought Venom into the Spiderverse in a way that makes sense. Venom's origin is a classic example of where the comic goes astray. Eddie Brock interviews a guy who claims to be [a criminal named] Sin-Eater and writes exclusives on him. Then, Spider-Man, miles away, captures the real Sin-Eater. Brock sees the headline 'Spider-Man captures Sin-Eater' and says, 'I'm horribly embarrassed, this is terrible for my career, I hate Spider-Man!' You think to yourself, 'Wait a minute, pal—that's stupid! Why hate Spider-Man, why not hate the guy who duped you?'

"Our reason for Eddie Brock hating Spider-Man has little to do with that kind of motivation. If I did that in an animation script, it wouldn't work. Regardless of how legitimate it is, it's bad writing. Our Eddie Brock is better motivated.

"Venom is another example. Venom was a bad guy until the comic started selling and suddenly, Venom is *good*," Semper laughs. "He's not gonna hurt innocents—forget all those innocents he has *already* killed, because now he isn't gonna hurt innocents! I see why they did it—it served the needs of the moment, but we're not gonna do that. Since we're starting from scratch, we're gonna take this because it worked and drop that if it doesn't."

One of Semper's favorite aspects of the show is working with Spidey's co-creator. "I'm a gigantic Stan Lee fan. He personally asked me to do this show. There are milestones in your life where you think, 'Gee, maybe I've actually arrived on some level.' When Stan said, 'I would really like you to work on *Spider-Man*,' that was one of those milestones! Don't ever tell him that," Semper jokes. "Ever since then, all he does is yell at me!

"Stan is extremely supportive and critical; I'm messing with his creation and he doesn't let me forget it! He's very hands-on with the show. This is Stan Lee's Spider-Man that we're doing and he knows how to put a story together.

"He's so amusing, Stan always makes me laugh, even when he's angry! That makes him even angrier! I laugh because he's so animated and entertaining. My favorite thing that he does is when he really hates something, he twists his face up as if he's sucked a rancid lemon and goes, 'Spider-Man wouldn't do that!' Sometimes it's worth putting in a line like 'Spider-Man befriends a dog and makes him his sidekick,' just to watch Stan's face twist up in contorted agony."

A Harvard grad, Semper notes, "I actually paid money in my first year of college—$12—to buy a ticket to see Stan Lee on campus. Stan is funny and has great stories, but if I had known that I would be able to get these stories for free one day, I would parade into his office now and get my $12 back!

"I've been very blessed in my life," Semper notes. "I've had one-on-one working relationships with some of the coolest people on the planet. I was close with Jim Henson when I wrote

and developed the animated *Fraggle Rock*, and I recently spent time with George Lucas working on a project," he reveals. "It was wonderful to work with him, plus I get to call him George! Now I'm sitting here every day with Stan! I would consider my life complete to have worked with any one of those guys, but *all three*?!"

The Boston-born writer entered animation after "a couple of lost years in the insurance business. It's a big deal when you decide whether or not you're gonna pursue your dreams. I finally said, 'To hell with this, I'm going to LA and see what I can do!' "

Semper then worked—unhappily—as a storyboard artist. "I didn't like it because you're not allowed to do anything creative. Back then, storyboard artists weren't supposed to deviate from the script. I wanted to be a writer, but it was like this sacred cult. It was as if somebody had to die before they would let a new person in. The only other thing I could do well was edit film."

After toiling as a Hanna-Barbera film editor, he was "unceremoniously laid off" and took a day job editing the feature film *D.C. Cab*. By night, Semper and girl friend Cynthia Friedlob became animation writers. "I always felt I could write better than the cartoon crap coming across my moviola," he declares. "It was god-awful stuff like *Trollkins*, Fred and Barney as Bedrock Cops and a very bad season of *Scooby-Doo*. I thought, 'This stuff is so bad, I know I can write it!'

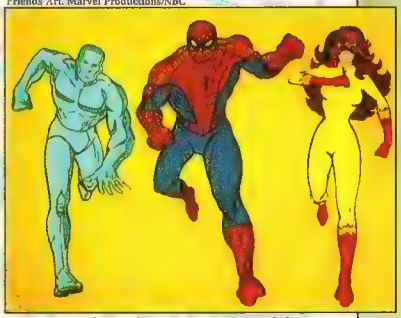
"Cynthia and I did so well selling *Scooby-Doos*, they made us staff writers! They were 10-minute mysteries with Scrappy Doo; dumb cartoons but a wonderful training ground. It was a triumphant return; laid off as a basement person, I returned to Hanna-Barbera with an office and desk. Thus began my writing career."

Semper also found time to pen the film *Class Act*, starring the rap duo Kid N' Play from the *House Party* movies. "Cynthia and I wrote the script and sold it to Warner Bros. in 24 hours. I said to her, 'We've never been hot, but we've always been cool!' "

The amazing arachnid is hitting the airwaves in a comic-to-TV cartoon renaissance, thanks to the impressive ratings of *Batman: The Animated Series* and *X-Men*. "I've got to do better [ratings-wise] than *Batman*," Semper confides. "*Batman* is a tremendous artistic achievement, but it plays more toward hip adults who are comic book fans, not the entire viewing public. *X-Men* is more successful than *Batman*—it's the number one show on Saturday mornings, and *X-Men* has more going for it. I've got to aim for them in terms of quality; I want to be as successful as *X-Men*.

Photo. CBS

Friends Art. Marvel Productions/NBC

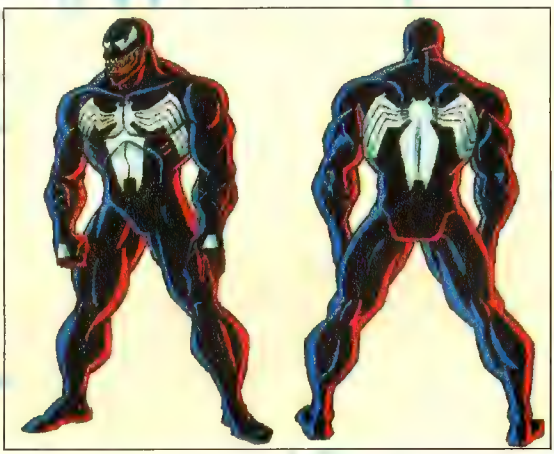


Spidey's other TV incarnations didn't impress Semper. He calls the live-action show goofy and says, "*Spider-Man and his Amazing Friends* was junk."

"I also want to do right one of the few things that *Batman* did wrong—you never got to spend much time with Bruce Wayne. I haven't seen many *Batman* episodes, which may contradict what I'm saying, but I think there's a two-dimensional look and feel to Batman. That's fine if you have a three-dimensional character, but if you have a Bruce Wayne who's essentially a mystery, you end up having to rise and fall based upon your villains.

"The Batman show is about the villain of the episode. 'Who is the villain? What's his problem?' It's not about Bruce Wayne and Batman. With me, it's the exact opposite: *Spider-Man* is about Spider-Man.

"Here's the difference if you're writing *Batman* versus *Spider-Man*: On *Batman*, you start out with the point-of-view of some bad guys. They're doing bad stuff, then the music goes up



"Our Venom is better motivated," states Semper, who retooled the nasty alien's origin for the series.

All Spider-Man & Associated Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1867, 1993, 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

"I wanted to do a show that took all of the comic book's elements, scrambled them up and kept it relatively the same but different," Semper declares

and the big shadow covers them and the villains turn and the audience turns and everybody goes, 'Aaah!' Batman appears and it's a big surprise to the audience and the villains.

"With *Spider-Man*, you open with Spider-Man webbing through the city, soliloquizing, and we're right over his shoulder. He looks down, sees some bad guys and swoops down after them. We're with him because we have to see everything through his eyes and get into his head. It's a less dramatic scene, but it makes for a stronger link between the audience and the main character. That's what *Spider-Man* is all about, the audience falling in love with this character and experiencing things in his life.

"On my show, we have to set up interesting situations and relationships, storylines that involve Peter Parker. Villains are important but Peter is *the* most important thing."

Some of Spidey's characteristics are hard to convey. "His spider-sense is the bane of my existence," Semper jokes. "I think we do it better than it has ever been done before for television; we do it accurately. In the live-action show, it worked like x-ray vision; somehow Spider-Man knew things that were going on behind walls, which was just ridiculous. The other animated shows either ignored it or used it in a contrived way.

"We use it as a 'sense,' like intuition. If someone is intending direct harm on Spidey, his spider-sense goes off. There's hardly an episode in which his spider-sense isn't used in one way or another. We won't see the 'squiggle lines' which appeared around his head in the comic, but there will be an effect, either graphic or computer-generated. There will definitely be a recognizable effect of him being warned by his spider-sense."

Writing many of the wall-crawler's adventures are comics veterans. "I want as many comic-book writers as I can get my hands on to write scripts," Semper states. "I already have Gerry Conway," the writer whose five-year stint on *The Amazing Spider-Man* introduced the Punisher, Hammerhead, Tarantula and killed off Gwen Stacy and Norman Osborn. "Gerry, now a successful TV writer, occasionally drops in to do an episode as a tremendous favor to me, 'cause we ain't paying him enough!

"He did 'Night of the Lizard,' which is our pilot. Gerry can write on this show whenever he feels like it. Brynne Stephens wrote the 'Batgirl' episodes of *Batman* and has done episodes for me—she did 'Venom, Part 2.' Elliot Maggin will probably do one. I want as many people identified as being *Spider-Man* writers. I told Danny Fingeroth, Stan and DeFalco that they have open invitations for episodes. I would love to say to all these *Spider-Man* writers, 'You have 22 minutes. Go!'

"I would love to do one solid week of what I call 'The Masters' and have a Conway story, a Lee, a DeFalco, a Fingeroth. I can honestly attest to having not followed the comic during the '80s, but I know there were many fine writers who worked on *Spider-Man* and I would like to get as many of them involved as possible.

"Here's a classic example: I'm doing an episode with the Punisher and I have Carl Potts writing it! Carl has been a buddy of mine for years. The Punisher story originated with me and I have Carl onboard to keep the Punisher pure.

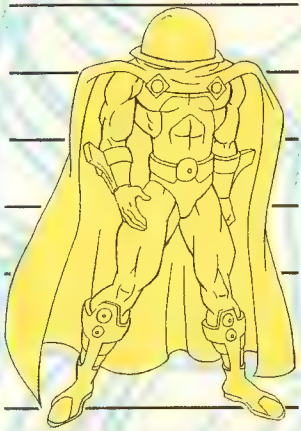
"Within the restrictions of Saturday

morning, we're doing a Punisher that is not watered down—he's the real, gun-toting Punisher!" Semper exclaims. "Spider-Man and Punisher will have major diffferences and it will be cool. I'm very excited about that story, it's the kind of thing I want to do. I know Gerry created Punisher, but Carl was the guy in the early '80s who really made the Punisher famous."

Semper is unimpressed with Spidey's past TV escapades. "I liked the 1960s cartoon as a kid because it was different. I watched it recently and it's pretty awful, but they did something nobody else did—they took comic stories that were revolutionary for their day and put them on the air! The origin story is almost exactly what Stan wrote, so that was miraculous. What I respond to now when I look at it is they're badly produced. *Spider-Man and his Amazing Friends* was junk.

"The live-action Nicholas Hammond-Spidey show was standard TV fare. The show looks goofy because they tried to do a show based in New York in Los Angeles, so you don't have any buildings. It's just goofy. The Japanese *Spider-Man* was more interesting. They do the wall-climbing, jumping and webbing really nicely. It's a hoot—he has a Spider-car and a giant robot. There has never been a really great Spider-Man show; ours is the first one that can aspire to that."

In developing the show, Semper reexamined all generations of the Spider-books. "I personally thought the John Romita Sr. years were some of the best Spider-Man reading there ever was. I also enjoyed Gil Kane and Steve Ditko. The later Ditko work was really quite wonderful—I've had to re-read all of this stuff."



The face of evil lurks inside the dome of Mysterio!

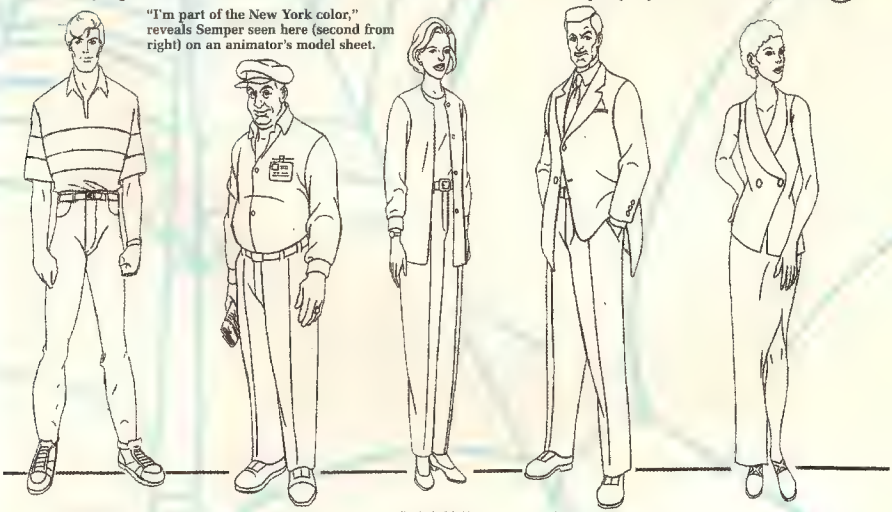
Semper also plans to do a few Marvel team-ups on the show. "I want to do one with Doctor Strange!" he reveals. "Dr. Strange has never been animated before.

"Spider-Man will meet the X-Men and all kinds of other Marvel characters. We're doing a crossover with *X-Men*. Despite all these guests, it's still gonna be the Spider-Man show. Someone asked me if we were gonna do *Secret Wars*. It's not inconceivable. My memory of *Secret Wars* is there were so many characters, you lost the focus on Spider-Man. That's one reason I veered away from it.

"All the limitations you've found before in animated versions of your favorite comics are going to disappear in *Spider-Man*, because I was an animation fan who was always frustrated by those limitations. Everybody better watch, because we can do *anything*!" Semper maintains. "I can do anyone on this show—any villain or character in the Marvel Universe! I'm trying to figure a way to do something with Ghost Rider. As long as I'm doing this show, it's gonna be one surprise after another, no holds barred."

Sharp-eyed viewers will also spot Semper as an extra in the show's background. "I'm part of the 'New York color' in *Spider-Man*, but I want to do a story where Spider-Man ends up in a parallel universe—our universe—and interacts with Stan, Avi and me. I have this great scene in my mind. I want to play me grumping and grousing that nobody thinks Spider-Man would do a certain thing except me, so we'll be arguing," John Semper laughs. "I want to go up to Spidey and say, 'Would you do this or wouldn't you?' and have Spidey say, 'Yeah, John, I would!' "

"I'm part of the New York color," reveals Semper seen here (second from right) on an animator's model sheet.



"I think Captain America and Iron Man are the big iconic Marvel characters," says James Robinson, author of the new *Tales of Suspense* graphic novel.

By JOE NAZZARO

As a longtime fan of Marvel's Silver Age, James Robinson was only too happy to take on the scripting chores for the *Tales of Suspense* graphic novel. "I remember a friend telling me that Marvel ended for him with *Avengers* #104," explains Robinson, "which was the last Roy Thomas issue, and while I was never that big a fan of that, I have a cutoff period; I know that my affections really lie with Gene Colan doing *Daredevil*, Jack Kirby on *Captain America* and Don Heck on *Iron Man*. I find those old stories really hard to top, and that's why I so readily jumped at the opportunity to do this book."

Robinson was originally approached by then-editor Fabian Nicieza, who asked the writer to create a story featuring Captain America and Iron Man, the two heroes who shared billing on the original *Tales of Suspense*. "To my knowledge, it was originally Fabian's brainchild, before he left Marvel to pursue his freelance writing, and the series was then handed to (editor) Marc McLaurin. *Tales of Suspense*, quite frankly, has the best characters. I think Captain America and Iron Man are the big iconic Marvel characters.

"Basically, Fabian said I could do something set in the past or the present. I could have two separate stories that didn't relate to each other like the original split books; I could really go in any direction I wanted. Since the continuity of both books is always changing, what I elected to do was a story pretty much set in the present, and possibly a little ways in the future, so you can't quite tell where it is and it doesn't conflict with what's happening at the moment. Iron Man's armor is never a constant, and I understand that Captain America's status is currently being changed.

"What I wanted to do was a story set in the present, but which tipped its hat to many of the charming elements from the original *Tales of Suspense* comic. This book's first third is told as a split narrative—each page split in half—with a separate Captain America story and Iron Man story until they finally meet. Nick Fury is in it, of course; he had to be because he was a crucial supporting player in those old stories, especially Captain America's."

Forget the complex changes in his status, Steve Rogers *is* Captain America in Robinson's ode to the Sentinel of Liberty's past.

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

Tony Stark's history comes back to haunt him when the plans he used to build his first set of armor in Vietnam fall into the wrong hands.

that Tony Stark used when he was in the Asian guerrilla compound where he created the original Iron Man armor. These are loose ends that both characters thought they had perhaps taken care of, but obviously hadn't, so because of necessity and guilt, they're forced to track down this group. S.H.I.E.L.D. gets them started independently of each other, but eventually, they both come to know of each other's involvement.

"This isn't a 'mature' book, by any means. What I tried to do was something sophisticated, but which at the same time echoed that simplistic charm of the old *Tales of Suspense*. I took great pride in having the villain explain everything to the hero towards the end, and then leave—threatening to kill him later, much as they did in those days. It was fun to do things like that.

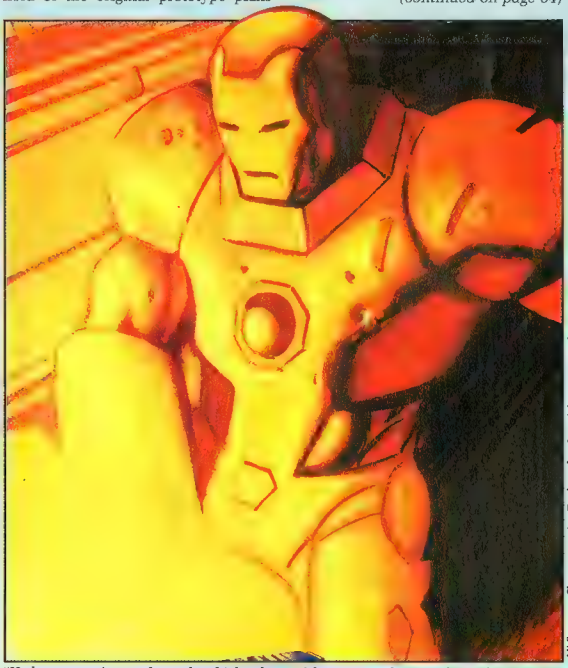
"I tried to keep the story very much in the old spy/espionage/super-tech, James Bond-ian world that, to my memory, was very much a part of *Tales of Suspense*. Those old Sleeper stories were wonderful. In fact, all the loose ends which they clean up in this

(continued on page 64)

All Art Colin MacNeil

Fifty years later, Captain America still fights the lingering effects of Nazi evil when the powerful Sleeper technology is recovered by terrorists.

The challenge for Robinson was devising a contemporary storyline that also captures elements of the 1960s adventures. "The story's springboard is a new terrorist group who you discover have empowered themselves using Sleeper technology [derived from the comic's Nazi sleeper-machines]. They also manage to get hold of the original prototype plans



All Suspense Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment

"He has a certain angular style which echoes Kirby," says Robinson of British artist Colin MacNeil, his choice to paint *Tales of Suspense*.

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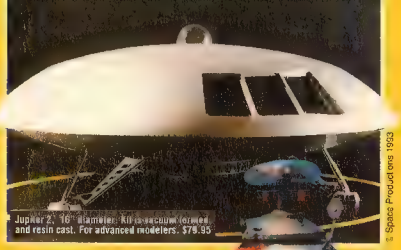

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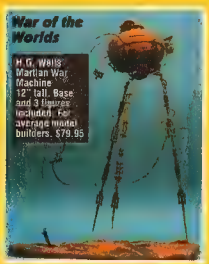

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Donovan Cook Has Found the Secret to Success: Making a Stupid Dog

By BOB MILLER

Donovan Cook is a rare exception in the animation business. That's because, usually, concepts for animated series are generated in-house at studios. But through persistence, an agent and a trend established by John Kricfalusi, Cook succeeded in selling his own concept from the outside, a breakthrough that many cartoonists dream about. When he sold 2 Stupid Dogs *in 1992, Cook became one of the youngest cartoon creators—at only 23 years old.*

COMICS SCENE: What was your background before *2 Stupid Dogs?*

DONOVAN COOK: When I was little, I used to make up stories in elementary school. I watched cartoons all the time. As I got to high school and they started asking me what I wanted to do, I leaned toward comic strips. I grew up in San Diego, and I was trying to sell comic strips to local papers, but I never could do the little three-panel jokes. So, I started working on animation. I found out about Cal Arts [California Institute of the Arts, the Disney-sponsored animation school in Valencia, California] and spent three years there.

[In the second year] Mike Giamo's class had a big group project where everybody played different roles, as a director, art director, animation designer or layout designer. I fell into the role of making sure everybody did their jobs properly and was working together. I don't know what happened that made me feel this way, but I decided that I would like to produce.

After the second year was over and I finished my film, I went to Disney Feature Animation to intern in the production department, and was basically a P.A. [production assistant] on *The Little Mermaid*. When I graduated, I went back to Disney as an assistant production manager on *The Prince and the Pauper*. Then, I started working with Mark Dindal [now directing *Cats Don't Dance* for Turner Pictures] in Special Projects as production manager.

I wanted to keep doing my own stuff after school, even though I was working at Disney and all my friends started working at other places. So, I got together a group of people who I went to school with, and we all sat down and came up with some ideas.

One was *2 Stupid Dogs*. Over about a nine-month period of time, we would work on it. They did some drawings, and we started some story premises and a storyboard, but after a while, the guys lost interest.

Artists oftentimes will be very excited about something and then become excited about something else. I still felt really strongly about the idea, so I made an agreement with them and paid them for their work. I continued to develop it and finished the storyboards, then started trying to sell it.

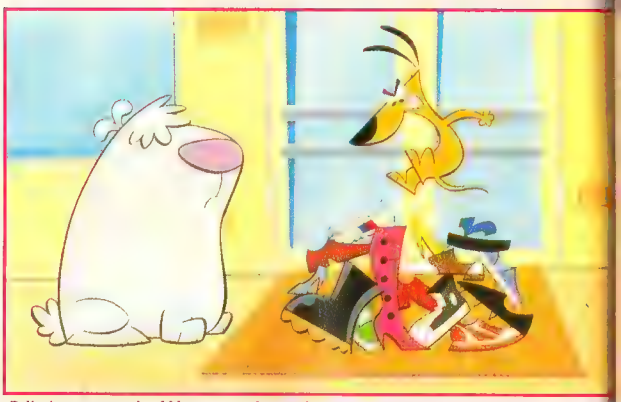
CS: So, you went out and pitched it yourself or did you get an agent?

COOK: I started pitching it myself, but I was having trouble. I didn't know anybody at Amblin or Warner Bros. When I called the people I didn't know, they were reluctant to see me. So, I got an agency to represent me. I got agents in early October [1991], and we made the rounds.

Most places liked it and thought it was funny, but didn't have any desire to do a short-format style, or just didn't really know *what* to do with it. Amblin was in the middle of their mess with *Family Dog*, so they weren't putting their hands into anything dog-related. Warner Bros. had a hundred things in development. So then we came here [to Hanna-Barbera] and they liked it.

CS: "They" meaning Fred Seibert, President of Hanna-Barbera Cartoons?

COOK: No, Fred wasn't here at the time. I pitched about two days before Turner took over the company. I didn't meet Fred until nine months afterward. During that transition, I was working at Bluth. I did some freelancing on



Believing cartoons should be "amazingly visual," Cook emphasized storyboards and design work over lengthy, wordy scripts.

Thumbelina from December until March. Then, I went to London to pick up *Thief and the Cobbler* for the completion bond company to bring it to Los Angeles. When we got it back, in early June, I started working with Fred Calvert to set up production and hire the staff. Gradually, he and I saw things differently as to whether the overseas people would be able to accomplish the same things that Richard Williams' studio was, and he finally fired me.

I went to Spümco, and worked on *The Ren and Stimpy Show* through July and August 'til their throat was cut by Nickelodeon. Then I came here to start developing *Secret Squirrel*.

CS: You mean *Secret Squirrel* and *2 Stupid Dogs*?

COOK: Well, the option for *2 Stupid Dogs* had already been picked up in early August. There wasn't a ton of development to be done on *Dogs*, because I had a lot done already. We wrote sort of a mini-bible that was just an expanded version of the material that I had when I was pitching. Most of the time spent was on *Secret Squirrel*. I came in and hired Paul Rudish to do the designs. He and I just sat in our office for three or four weeks working on it, doing designs and story ideas. I started to board the first one, and before I was able to get halfway through it, the whole series got its "go" for production.

CS: How did you decide on *Secret Squirrel* to be a part of *2 Stupid Dogs*?

COOK: When we—Fred [Seibert], Margot [McDonough], Buzz [Potamkin] and everybody here—were setting up *2 Stupid Dogs* to be a series of three 7-minute shorts, they had thought it would be better to have something else in the middle, to give it some variety. I really didn't want to do two new shows at one time. So, I asked Fred if I could look at the older Hanna-Barbera shows, and possibly rework one. He thought that was a great idea, because he's really into the older stuff.

In his office, he had this book of all the characters in a huge binder. I was flipping through it and I flipped to Secret Squirrel, *then* I remembered how much I liked it and I said, '*Whoa*, Fred, can I do this?' And he said, 'Great. Go work on it.'

That's when I hired Paul [Rudish]. We spent a lot of time together looking at the old stories. They revolve around the Cold War, which of course doesn't exist now. So, we just decided we would go more extreme and have just crazy people instead of Communists.

CS: Why did you change Secret Squirrel's design?

COOK: We didn't stray too far from the model. He still looks the same. We flattened him out a tiny bit. Paul's drawing style is natural, rhythmic and very appealing, and part of it is that it's very simple. The original Secret Squirrel had some things that to us were a little bit awkward. I think it's because it was from a different time, and we just wanted to simplify it.

We talked about how [in the original series] it was funny that they were the only animals. Since we wanted to be more extreme in the humor and the gags, we figured, 'Well, let's make *all* the characters more extreme.' We can do that when we use animals, so we changed *all* of the human characters into animals. That's probably the biggest liberty we took with the show.

The world of *2 Stupid Dogs* is like the real world, only the rules are a bit different: The dogs can do things and talk to people and nobody freaks out. We wanted Secret Squirrel to have his own separate world, so nobody would

Design & Layout: Freddy Collado

confuse the two shows. Those were the reasons for redesigning it. [Marketing surveys indicated *Secret Squirrel* did not mesh with *2 Stupid Dogs*, so *Secret* was dropped from the second season, replaced by 13 new *Dogs* segments].

CS: Kricfalusi was involved in an episode.

COOK: Yeah, for the Dogs. There are three that he worked on with me.

CS: How did you arrange that?

COOK: It was actually because I had met John working at Spümco. I was just an assistant director, and I learned a lot about his thinking and his [way of] timing the show.

When we were in production, I asked if I could pitch him a storyboard to get his critique. As I had hoped, he was very, um, *honest* with his opinion, and pointed out a lot of flaws. And *he* was generous enough to offer to work with me.

So, we took one story and broke it into three parts, "The Red Riding Hood Trilogy." They're called "Red," "Red Strikes Back" and "The Return of Red."

The credit is "Tidbits of Poor Taste Supplied by John Kricfalusi." He and Richard Pursell came over one morning and we hammered out the three stories.

These three are different, because John's sense of humor is real different from mine. There are gross jokes in them, but (*chuckles*), nothing quite as extreme [as *Ren and Stimpy*]. I'm sure he would look at them as quite tame.

When you're working with somebody else, and seeing their sense of humor, it helps to identify yours. It helped me focus on the season's second half and hone our direction a bit more.

CS: You have front-end credits on each short. Was that your idea?

COOK: Yeah. I wanted to do that for two reasons. One, we're trying to emulate the old shorts. They always had their credits in the front. Secondly, TV credits are [over with in] a blink. The writers *always* get front-end credit in television, and the way we produced the show was very much a team effort.

The writers didn't write a full-blown script and tell the storyboard artists, "You will storyboard what we've written." At Warner Bros., supposedly the first page of the script is a letter to the storyboard artist, "Don't change anything. Storyboard everything that is written," and to "cut out the words, paste them onto the storyboard."

We were very much the opposite of that. *Secret Squirrel* outlines were always a little bit longer, five or six pages; the *Dogs* outlines were only four. Then, we would storyboard them. The storyboard artist wrote a lot of the stories, and developed the characters quite a bit.

So, I thought it was important not only to have [front-end credit for] the writer and the storyboard artist, but also for Paul Rudish, Bernie Petterson and Larry Huber, the producer; he and I co-produced the half-hour. Larry took care of *Secret Squirrel*.

Paul Rudish is such an important part of *Secret Squirrel* because everything you see is designed by him. The same with *2 Stupid Dogs*: All the character designs are by Craig McCracken, and the look of the backgrounds is attributed to Mike Moon. Those two guys worked as a team to give *2 Stupid Dogs* its distinctive look. It was only fair to give them front-end credits, so that people could see that they were very important to the making of these cartoons.

CS: You went directly from outline to storyboard, bypassing the final script phase. Isn't this a radical departure from the way TV cartoons are usually made?

COOK: It's a radical departure from the way they're made *now*. It's actually just going back to the way they *were* made. People here went crazy when I told them this was the way I wanted to do it.

CS: How did you convince them?

COOK: Honestly? I said, 'John [Kricfalusi] does it.' That's the way he was working at Spümco. I got many things done, thanks to John (*chuckles*). Because Fred Seibert is a huge fan of John, and has worked with him before. Any studio person has a lot of respect for John because he created a very successful property and a very high-quality product.

So, I used that to get back to the way that cartoons *should* be made. Cartoons are not a fully-written form of storytelling. They should be amazingly visual. We searched really hard and found some very visual writers, a couple of whom *can* draw and write as well. The story editor [Mark Saraceni] is very visual and spent the majority of his time working on comedy cartoons, not action-adventure.

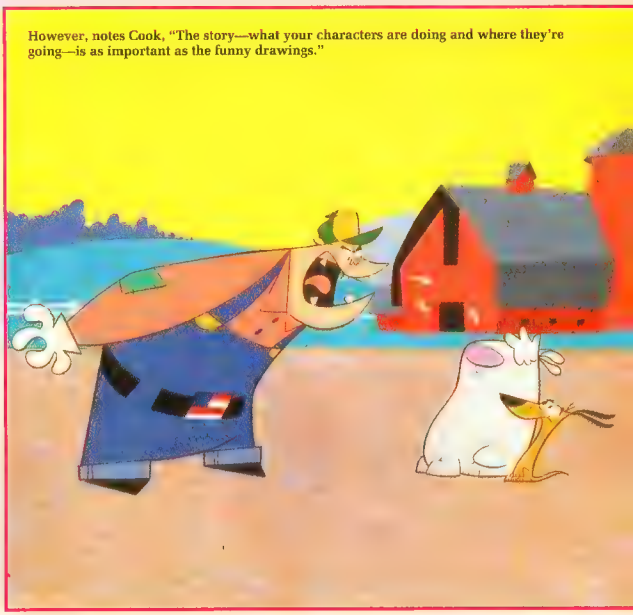
It's very important for the emphasis to be on visual humor. You'll hear John preach for just *hours* that funny drawings are the key.

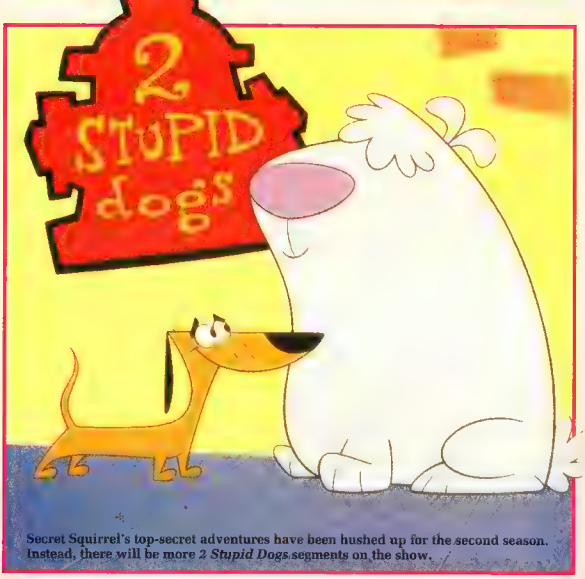
I particularly believe that the story—not necessarily your plot—but the story—what the characters are doing and where they're going—is as important as the funny drawings, whereas John doesn't.

Basically, the way I try and approach a story is, what do the characters want? Then in the end, they either get it or they don't. There are many short cartoons that don't really pay too much attention to whatever you set up

All 2 Stupid Dogs Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Hanna-Barbera Cartoons, Inc.

However, notes Cook, "The story—what your characters are doing and where they're going—is as important as the funny drawings."





Secret Squirrel's top-secret adventures have been hushed up for the second season. Instead, there will be more *2 Stupid Dogs* segments on the show.

in the beginning. You should try to wrap up at the end. Sometimes cartoons are really just gag-gag-gag-gag-BIG gag-end. There's no concern for beginning, middle and the end.

But, that's the way they used to make them here and at Warner Bros. That's the idea Joe [Barbera] and Bill [Hanna] used to make *Tom and Jerry*. They would write these simple little outlines and then they would storyboard them, and that's where all the gags would come from.

CS: Since the show is in syndication, you don't have to worry about Standards and Practices.

COOK: Not totally, but it's nothing like the network, Thank God. We would have had tremendous troubles if we had network Standards and Practices.

We had scenes where characters would do stuff that was an imitatable act that we had to change. They *never* said, "Take it out"; they said, "Rework it."

In the show where they go to the drive-in, the original board had Big Dog pushing in the little cigarette lighter and it popped back out and he looked at it, and he actually bit it and ate it. And they said, "Whoa, if somebody puts a cigarette lighter in their mouth, that's imitatable." We just reworked it so that he pushed it in and it wobbled and then shot into his mouth.

They let us do the jokes, but just made sure we weren't putting ourselves into a position to have some little kid somewhere eat a piece of glass because Big Dog did it. Which is fine. I don't know what I would do if something happened like that, if I found out some kid got really hurt and died because he was playing with stuff that had to do with my characters.

CS: Like *Beavis and Butt-head*?

COOK: That would be a heavy hit. It makes you really stop and think. I know that there are complaints that it's on at the wrong time and that parents shouldn't let their kids watch *Beavis and Butt-head* because it's not for kids, but our show is for everybody, but hopefully it's a show that kids will like to watch. It's *not* a show that's *not* for kids, that's for sure. So I don't want to screw up the kids. You can still do jokes without having characters eat fire.

In "Family Values," the Dogs get adopted. The family is having a barbecue, and the dad overcooks the hot dogs, so they're actually on fire. Little Dog gets one and he plays Hot Potato with Big Dog and he finally winds up sticking it in Big Dog's mouth, and Big Dog belches fire and sets fire to the house. The networks would say, "No way." But it was nice here because none of the characters said, "I'm going to take this fire and put it in my mouth, and then set this house on fire." It's all within the context of accidents or jokes. It's a fine line.

Standards and Practices bugs you a lot, because sometimes you want to do a joke and you have to re-think it. But in many cases where we re-thought the joke, we made it funnier.

CS: What were your influences?

COOK: Cartoon-wise, obviously Chuck Jones is a huge influence. Tex Avery for just raw humor. In my case, Disney is a big influence for storytelling.

CS: What cartoons did you watch as a kid?

COOK: *That's* why it's so cool to be here, because Scooby-Doo and Atom Ant and Secret Squirrel filled my brain. That, and the Looney Tunes that they would replay. I used to watch the *Superfriends* a lot, but I really watched *Scooby-Doo* religiously. Yogi Bear and Huckleberry Hound. *That* stuff is from way back. The last thing I want to do is copy what they did, but our direction is to go back and try to emulate what we really liked about the flat style and the graphic look of the early shows.

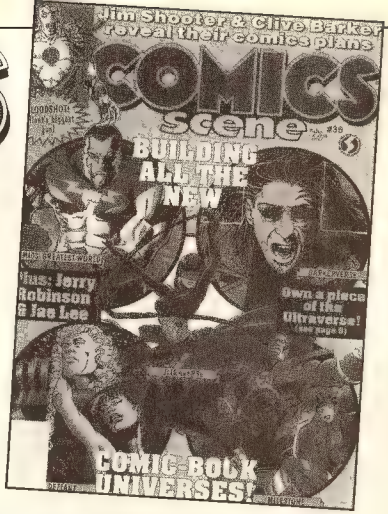
CS: Last year, you proposed new shorts for *Cattanooga Cats* and *The Hair Bear Bunch*, but the studio nixed the idea. Weren't you also trying to revive *Snooper and Blabber*?

COOK: Actually, we *were* attempting to do Snooper and Blabber [in the first season], but we lost our direction.

The guys that were working with me—Craig McCracken, Paul Rudish, Mike Moon and Robin Zetti, who's the story guy—stayed around to redevelop *Cattanooga Cats*, *Hair Bear Bunch* and *Snooper & Blabber*, because we thought those characters were cool. Paul was doing the design work on it. we just never found our focus on that.

To me, as an animator, the worst thing in the world is working on something you don't want to do. As a director, the last thing I want to do is tell artists, "I don't care if you don't like it, I think it's right, so *do* it." Because then they're not going to enjoy doing it. I firmly believe that when people enjoy doing their work and have fun, it actually translates to the audience. The audience can tell that there's a certain amount of sincerity involved. So that's why if [something isn't working out], we move onto something else. CS

COMICS scene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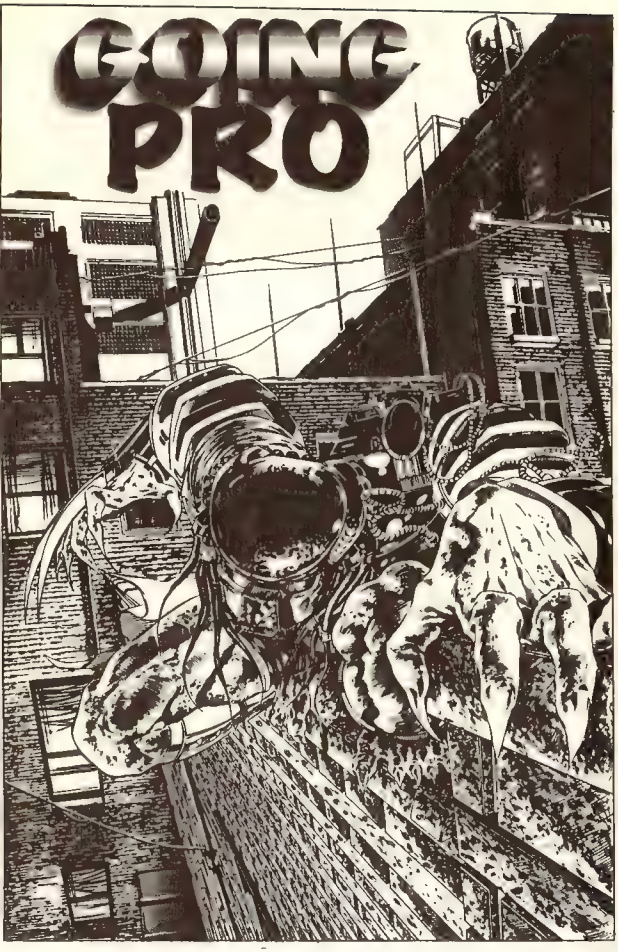


Up-and-coming artist Jordan Raskin makes sure every picture tells a story.

By EVELYN SCHUMAN

All Art By & Courtesy: Jordan Raskin

"Being a penciller is more than just drawing pretty pictures," says Jordan Raskin, "you need to play the part of a director as well as a draftsman."

It's not hard to imagine why he's named RipClaw, or why writer Marc Silvestri tapped Raskin to bring his creation to life on the page.

Anything can happen in a comic book: you can draw galaxies, grimy city streets or underworld kingdoms—it's all up to your imagination," says penciller Jordan Raskin. As a newcomer, he has already created some top-notch artwork, having collaborated with writer Andrew Vachss on the *Predator: Race War* mini-series from Dark Horse Comics. In his strikingly realistic style, vivid details and dynamic visuals sizzle—grabbing the reader's attention. Raskin's fertile imagination is stirred by being able to tell stories visually through his art. "With film, you're somewhat limited by a budget and available technology," he says, "but with drawing, your creativity is only limited by your imagination."

Although he has never really been a comics fan, it seemed a natural medium for Raskin's artistic expression. "I went through a brief stage when I liked Marvel's *X-Men*, and Batman was a character I could get into because it was more believable, more real," he notes. "But these days I don't read comics, I just don't have the time. But if I happen to be in a comic store with a friend, I'll pick up a Dark Horse book to breeze through."

About drawing comics, Raskin notes, "Storytelling is my favorite part

of comic book illustration. Being a penciller is more than just drawing pretty pictures; you need to play the part of a director as well as a draftsman. Primarily what I like about storytelling is setting up the scene with a dark, moody street atmosphere of dilapidated buildings—something to draw the reader in, where they actually fear someone will walk around the corner and mug them."

When he was a kid, Raskin had an obsession with Japanese monster movies. Godzilla, Ghidrah and Gammera were some of his favorites—he even went so far as to make clay models of them. The realms of fantasy lured him in early on, with games like *Dungeons and Dragons*. Raskin, however, was a late bloomer, not realizing his artistic potential until high school art class. But there he finally focused in on what he wanted to do with his future.

At that point, he attended his first major comic book convention. Practically everyone warned him that the experience would be depressing, but instead it empowered him. "At the show, other artists—professionals of course—were critiquing me, ripping my work apart. Not purposefully—call it constructive criticism. But I was 17 and didn't even know I should be showing storytelling samples, not just pinup pieces. So, I carried in this big illustration board with a montage of drawings on it. That's how little I knew about the industry at that time," he laughs. "But when I left, I had this big smile on my face and I remember the exact words I spoke to my father when he picked me up after the show: 'Now I know what I have to do.' "

Raskin's transition from wannabe comics artist to paid professional came when his work impressed an editor of a small independent company. He was given the phone number of Evolution Comics by Rick Bryant, an artist he met at a comics con, and decided to call them just as he was dropping out of the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon Art. Initially, Evolution wasn't thrilled with his samples. Not wanting to just leave it at that, Raskin asked to do a sample plot on spec. Evolution liked the new samples and hired him to do "Vidorix the Druid," which was part of an anthology book containing two 12-page stories.

"It was a great learning experience as well as good exposure," notes Raskin. "I was working at Pizza Hut at the time, so Evolution was my foot in the door—actually more like a big toe. The most important thing I got out of Evolution, besides the experience of drawing an actual book, was going to comics conventions as a guest. This is important, because conventions are where you make your contacts."

"I had never drawn comics on a deadline basis or experienced burnout before," notes Raskin, who was unable to complete *Predator: Race War*.

All Predator Art: Dark Horse Comics
Predator Character: Copyright 20th Century Fox

Art: Jordan Raskin/Kevin Nowlan

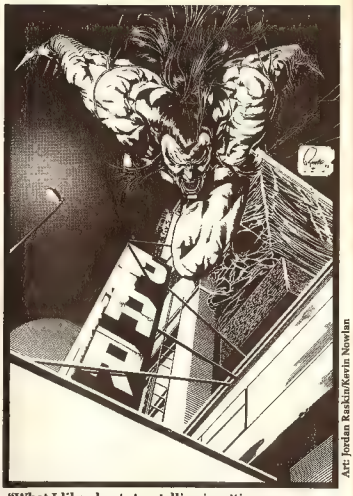
For the most part, Raskin enjoys doing cons because he gets the chance to encourage new, up-and-coming artists and give them the same kind of breaks that he got. "The purpose of a critique is to point out mistakes to help them improve their work. Not just to pat them on the back and say, 'Good job.' I start my conversations by explaining that they shouldn't take my criticisms personally. It's meant to be constructive, not degrading."

Raskin's drawing style leans more towards realism, in the same genre as his main creative influences, Kevin Nowlan, Mark Beachum, Frank Frazetta and, for inking, Bryant. "I met Rick at a small convention. If he hadn't encouraged me and introduced me to the more realistic style of artwork, I probably would be drawing more along the lines of John Byrne and Jim Lee. Rick showed me artwork [that was] illustration, giving everything a reality base," he explains.

"For about two months, I was fortunate enough to have Mark Beachum hanging out at the studio I work out of in Manhattan. I have nothing but good things to say about Mark. I learned a lot looking at his work, and if it wasn't for his suggestions every so often, my work probably wouldn't have improved as quickly as it did. He's so generous with his knowledge and experience." Other mentors include high

X-Men Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

Raskin applied his realistic, yet heroic illustration style to Marvel's mighty mutants for the cover of *X-Men Index* #4.



Art: Jordan Raskin/Kevin Nowlan

"What I like about storytelling is setting up the scene with a dark, moody atmosphere," Raskin reveals.

school art teacher Sevy Gangemi and a favorite instructor at the Kubert School, Ben Ruiz. "These guys knew how to teach, as well as convey information. Mark, Ben and Sevy taught me more about life than just artwork, they generously shared their experiences."

His formal art training consists of a semester at the Joe Kubert School of Cartooning and the Ringling School of Illustration. "I'm mostly self-taught," Raskin explains, "because I learn through observation and sitting down and working hard on it. I didn't graduate because I've never learned from a structured school of teachers per se. I've found that life, what little I've experienced of it, is the best teacher."

The project that hurled Raskin's career toward high visibility was the *Predator: Race War* comic mini-series. "Randy Stradley at Dark Horse had been looking for the right artist when Chris Warner handed him my work, saying, 'I think you should look at this!' Dark Horse contacted me based on some samples I had sent them," he relates. Raskin was hired on the spot, and from an unsolicited submission, demonstrating that perseverance and talent, sprinkled with a touch of luck, can sometimes open the door to opportunity. "As the saying goes, I was just at the right place at the right time."

Predator: Race War turned out to be both a high point and a low point of his young career. As a novice, the harsh deadlines played havoc with Raskin's life. "I took that job and worked my butt off! I barely slept four hours a night and the rest of the time I was drawing," groans Raskin. "I did some stupid things on that project, but they were meant to help improve my storytelling and draftsmanship ability. I literally drew some completely detailed pages, and if I didn't like them when I was done, I completely *erased* them and started over again. In hindsight, I should kick myself for that. But sitting down, drawing, erasing, fixing my mistakes and really working hard on it is what helped me get better.

"You can see the improvement in my work from issue #0 to issue #2, as well as the change in influence as you go from page to page. It's like Jordan Raskin doing Kevin Nowlan and Mark Beachum, not an exact clone. You can still see that influence now, but it's thinning out as I go along," he notes. "Now I'm influenced by reality and the life that's going on all around me." At this stage in his career, Raskin depends primarily on photography and film for inspiration. His favorite directors include Ridley Scott, James Cameron and John Woo, the Hong Kong action director who made *Hard Target* and *The Killer*.

"My most exciting collaboration so far has been with Andrew Vachss and Randy Stradley at Dark Horse," Raskin states. "Randy adapted Vachss' script to comic-book format, breaking down the script and editing it, so I could follow it easier. He did an incredible job on that project. I would really like to work with both of them again sometime."

Vachss, a respected child advocate attorney as well as a brilliant crime fiction writer, gives his stories a moody, hard-hitting edge. The fact that he was also a prison warden lends reality and credibility to his writing. "But it's very rare to get him to write

anything on a character that he didn't create himself," Raskin says. "The reason he wrote *Predator: Race War* was because he was able to put his own spin on it. *Predator* is never really about the Predator itself, for the most part, but always about the supporting character's reactions to the situations the Predators are creating."

Raskin is deeply sorry he didn't get a chance to finish *Predator: Race War*. "As this was my first major professional job, I had never drawn comics on a deadline basis or experienced burnout before," he explains. "At the end of the third *Dark Horse Presents* installment, I had put in a lot of intricate detail. And as the deadlines started creeping up, I was slowing down and drawing actually became a chore. I was doing a page every four days instead of every two days, and the inker, Rick Bryant, was also moving slowly due to all the details I drew, not to mention his other commitments. I kept apologizing to Jerry Prosser, my editor, but they were running out of time. I had a choice: I could either pick up the pace and meet the deadlines, which meant dropping the work's quality, or bow out gracefully and allow them to find someone to continue the project. I opted to bow out because I didn't think it would look good for me to suddenly improve on the project and then towards the end start getting worse."

The artist landed a job with Image through a talent search, after sending in the first issue of pencils for *Predator: Race War*. Two weeks later, Marc Silvestri offered him the *RipClaw* mini-series. "I was really flattered that Marc chose me to work on his creation, because during the short time I was really reading comics, he was one of my favorite artists. So when he called, I thought someone was pulling a prank phone call!" he laughs. "But I told him I had to finish out my prior commitments. He understood and respected my decision. Besides, he didn't have a script ready for me yet anyway." Since then, of course, a script has materialized, which Raskin is illustrating.

Raskin has pencilled and inked a wrap-around cover for the *X-Men Index* for Marvel. He's also working on three pages of the 'X' issue of *Thunder Agents*. "Under a very tight deadline, so don't blame me if the ink job is a bit sloppy!" he adds. *Punisher* editor Don Daley offered him a three-issue story arc of *Punisher War Zone*, but Image made him a better offer. He says he may still rendezvous with the Punisher someday when his schedule allows.

He has also had a couple of creator-owned trading cards published in the *Creators Universe* by Dynamic Forces.

The Strangers: Copyright 1993 Malibu Comics.

No longer just an anonymous face in a line at some convention, Raskin is becoming sought-after in the comic book industry.

"My characters are designed around a story concept created by my partner Ray Weisfeld and I," he adds. "I'll be co-writing the story as well, so it's not just about the costume design looking 'cool.' There has to be a reason for it to look that way. Ray is one of those writers who makes everything add up in a story. I like the positive energy produced when I work with him. We have all these ideas flowing back and forth," he states. "I'm a very big fan of storytelling, and probably one of the few 'pro-writer' artists you'll find around in the industry today. Drawing big huge panels and lots of action scenes is all well and good, but I feel it should be within the context of a story structure. Not the story written for the purpose of drawing cool-looking pages. I want our story to really catch an audience, not just the artwork alone."

Weisfeld and Raskin are also teaming up on a job for Penthouse Comix. "Ray, who's also the managing editor at Penthouse Comix, wrote a wild script around a character he created called 'Dixie Snake-Eyes,'" Raskin reveals. "I read the plot and it's not for kids, but I think I'll have a lot of fun drawing it."

Summing up his possible future, Jordan Raskin simply says, "I see myself in comic books for a long time." CS

"It's not just about the costume design looking 'cool.' There has to be a reason for it to look that way," says Raskin of creating his own characters.

Armageddon Incorporated: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Jordan Raskin

Design & Layout: Freddy Collado

A•X

(continued from page 24)

Wolfman admits that he has written his share of violent comics, including *Vigilante* and *Deathstroke, the Terminator*, but notes that the violence exists for a reason.

"*Vigilante* was a book that examined violence," he says. "To tell a story about violence and how it acts on somebody, you must show it. *Deathstroke, the Terminator* is about a man who has decided where violence fits in his life. AX is a character who finds himself in an incredibly violent world, and then must decide what he's going to do about it. The question is not whether these characters are violent, but whether violence is the reason these characters have to make certain decisions. I'm not using violence in *A•X* just for its own sake, but to propel the story. The violence in *A•X* is vital to the character, because he has to make decisions based on what he's doing. Whereas there are some books that I feel are far too violent—that are less violent than mine—it's because I think they've just glorified violence for no reason. Woo's films are considered exceedingly violent by many, but there's always a strong moral center to them. I don't think it's violence *per se*, but what you are *saying* with the violence. Violence is not a happy thing."

Although Wolfman isn't opposed to a sequel for *The Man Called A•X*, he hasn't thought very far beyond the first series. "The first six issues explore 'What is AX?' and deals with several families who run the city," he says. "The only sequel I have in mind—and I only have the concept, not the story—is the obvious. Now that we know *what* he is at the end of the first six-parter, the second story is *who* he is. If something else comes to mind, OK, but my idea with *A•X* was to do a novel, and I wasn't worrying about stuff besides character development and a solid story with a beginning, middle and end. If *A•X* does very well, there's one other area I could explore, and another story I could tell."

Despite any philosophical underpinnings on the nature of the action and violence in the series, Wolfman wants readers to know that *A•X* is a great deal of fun.

"I've been talking about the serious nature of violence and telling a story, but this is a fun adventure/crime story with heavy action and good characters—I don't want anyone to think this is some heavy treatise on violence, though it's all there in the story," says Marv Wolfman. "This *isn't* some deep exploration of violence. *The Man Called A•X* is a good, fun action story that I'm incredibly proud of!"

Ayers

(continued from page 19)

gued to no end to keep him a federal marshal. That gave him reason to ride off with all the guys strung up on a rope trailing behind his horse in the end: He had arrested them."

After years of inking Kirby, one day in 1963, a Steve Ditko Iron Man story showed up in Ayers' mailbox. Not just any issue, but the pivotal episode in which Tony Stark first dons his sleek red-and-gold armor. The end product pleased no one—especially Ayers.

"I couldn't adapt to Steve's work," he observes. "I didn't like the results myself. There was nothing I could do with my brush that would make me like what I did. The pencils were too loose."

Ayers recalls having no significant input into the new design. "I didn't change anything," he says. "The only thing I tried to do would be to add a little bit more of a metallic look—texture stuff and technical things."

When Ayers left Marvel for DC in 1974, he ironically found himself once more following Kirby, this time taking over *Kamandi*. Then came a long stint on what Ayers considers the last of the great comic book Western characters, Jonah Hex.

Since then, Ayers has worked for many companies and even tried retirement for a while. But comics kept pulling him back. Most recently, he has been working for AC Comics and Topps—for which, teamed with inker John Severin, he once more found himself drawing a Jack Kirby superhero, Bombast.

Ultimately, inking Kirby may have been something Ayers was born to do. The artist himself recalls a foreshadowing of his future experienced at the very outset of his career.

"Back in 1946 when I was going to art school, I was making the rounds one Friday. And I went up to *Popular Science*. I don't know why; it had nothing to do with comics. The editor said, 'You should go up to see [Joe] Simon and Kirby. Your style is a lot like theirs.' And I didn't know who they were! When I looked into it, it was a natural thing. That editor saw something that I didn't. Years later, I worked for both of them."

Not surprisingly, Ayers sees himself as one of Kirby's strongest inkers. "Whenever anybody inked his work, except Wally Wood or Joe Simon himself, you can tell it's Jack's pencilling because they do just what I told you I did—a love story."

Forty years of inking have given Ayers a firm sense of how to ink a comic book page and how *not* to ink a comic page.

"I let myself go and get comfortable and *feel* what I'm doing," he explains. "I have a set pattern where I want things to be standing out. If you pick up one of the current comics and look at the page, it's just a collage of many things going on and you can't pick out the central action. I do that by foreground, middleground, background type of thing, and working the strongest in the foreground and getting weaker as I go back.

"To me, it's living a story. I start with the splash panel and I go from that to the next to the next to the next panel. Even when I pencil, I start with the splash panel first, which can be very rough. I would get a World War I story and I would have it in front of me, thinking about it for a few days, so I can get psyched up, because I would have to do it from the beginning. I like the storytelling."

As for the claim that Ayers' inking may have saved Marvel from oblivion, consider that Ayers inked seminal issues of everything from *The Avengers* to *The X-Men*. And in those early days, the second most prolific Kirby inker was Paul Reinman.

"I loved his inking style," Ayers says of his old friend Reinman, now out of the business. "I didn't care for him on Kirby, or myself, but I liked him when he did his own thing in the horror books. When he inked me, it looked classy, but the fluidity was lost."

Despite his background, these days Ayers is perceived more as a Western or war expert than a superhero artist. "The editors think of me that way," he says ruefully. "I can't believe superheroes lasted this long. Before, everything was a trend. It only lasted a short period of time, so you had to be ready to draw monsters, Westerns, war stories or detective stories. These things—super-superheroes I call them—keep going on and on and on. And they all look the same to me. Maybe Westerns will come back."

If they do, Ayers will be ready. Some time back, he and Tom DeFalco collaborated on a graphic novel revival of the Rex Fury Ghost Rider, only to have it shelved. In the unfinished story, Rex Fury would be revealed as the father of World War I Ace Jack Fury, who in turn sired Nick Fury!

"It had a very nice ending," Ayers says wistfully, "with Jack Fury in his Spad on a dirt airstrip and Rex Fury holding baby Nick Fury in his arms."

Such disappointments aside, Dick Ayers is happy he stayed in comics. "I got no kicks," he concludes. "I enjoy doing it. Last year was the busiest year of my life. I was getting up at 5 a.m., and starting at 6 a.m. and working right through suppertime, day in and day out."

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Astonish

(continued from page 27)

tional scientist, mostly, being rational and intellectual. Janet is a flake, the one who packs a dozen steamer trunks to cover 'the essentials.' And the Hulk is somewhere between the two. I found lots I could do with these three, which made it fun for me."

This newest incarnation of one of Marvel's original titles has been in the works for years, but David says that although the writing was fun, unfortunately, it had to be shoehorned into his killer schedule, which juggles monthly comics as well as novels.

"I wrote the book out of self defense," he admits. "They asked, and I said that if anyone's going to screw up the Hulk, it's gonna be me. It's one of my worries, that whenever anyone else writes the Hulk, I cringe. I don't want to cite any one writer...this way, they can think I'm picking on all of them. This one took awhile because it was done in pieces. I would finish 20 pages and send them to John, hoping that would keep him going for awhile, then I would get back some pages to script and send out more plot pages. We went around like that for some time, so it's hard to say how long it took overall. Longer than an average *Hulk* plot and script."

The new art style was a pleasure for David to see, though he says there were no major differences in his approach to the story. "It was fun to see my stuff in a painted format; I've never had any of my stories done this way, so it was great for me to see it. Some of these scenes are really breathtaking! One thing I did was write scenes a painter could take off on...giant serpents, walls of flame, scantily clad women. You know, real mythological stuff, big and nifty and colorful. If I'd had the Hulk fighting armies of guys in khaki, that would have wasted John's potential to deliver big, and he did."

The recent success of *Marvels* had little to do with the decision to make *Tales* a painted work. David says that the Kurt Busiek/Alex Ross limited series succeeded on its own merits, not simply because of its striking visuals.

"I think it was some of Kurt's best work, and I'm glad he's getting the recognition he has always deserved. Alex Ross brought a great story to life with his painting. I'm not the guy to ask why a book succeeds; I just sit here in my office and write comics. But I don't think it had to do with origins or nostalgia or anything like that—they just had a great story, with a great angle, and it was under-ordered. When people found out about it, there was a scramble to buy the books," he says.

David keeps a timeline for the Hulk's adventures, and says *Tales* fits in somewhere between issues #408 and #409. "The Hulk is the head of the Pantheon in this story and we have a Delphi cameo, so it isn't out of my continuity. It isn't quite like 'Future Imperfect' [his deluxe-format Hulk story with George Perez], which specifically happens between issues #416 and #417. That was worked into my plot for some time. This doesn't have much impact on *Hulk* continuity, so where it fits isn't that important. I can work around it in my book. The story doesn't tie in with *Avengers* continuity either, as far as I know. It has more connections with their past than their present."

Would he do another *Tales to Astonish*? "Right now, it's not meant to be an ongoing title. I couldn't fit another regular or semi-regular book into my schedule now, but if we were to do one every one or two years—sure! I'm there! Nobody has brought up the possibility yet, but it might happen."

As for other writing projects, he says it is likely there will be a trade paperback in 1995, collecting all four issues of *Sachs & Violens*, his recent Epic mini-series with art by Perez. However, this wouldn't merely be a reprint of previous material; David intends to include a novella featuring model/vigilante J.J. Sachs' involvement in the Presidential campaign of a governor, to be called "The Governor and J.J." (a title saluting a beloved '60s sitcom). A second mini-series, projected for 1996, would be set in Hawaii.

"There are three reasons for that," he confirms. "One, it has so many different settings, so much variety, from volcanoes to jungles to beaches to cliffs, we couldn't ever run out of interesting backgrounds. Two, we could write it off as a work expense. And three, we've got great titles: 'Poi Meets Girl,' 'Lei of the Land'..."

Peter David adds that, while he generally doesn't express interest in characters already in print ("there's an unspoken implication that I don't like the way that writer is doing that character, so I never talk about characters I would like to do"), there *is* a title opening up that he would enjoy trying.

"Now that Neil Gaiman is leaving *Sandman* [soon to become *The Dreaming*, a title with rotating creators], I wouldn't mind giving that a shot. Of course, again, nobody has asked me. I'm ready and waiting...

"The work is fun when it goes well; when it doesn't, it's a job. Grit your teeth and go on. Even at the best of times, it's lonely. Giving a writer work is the worst thing you can do to him, because then he always wanders around complaining, 'Oh, I'm so busy.' But I love it."

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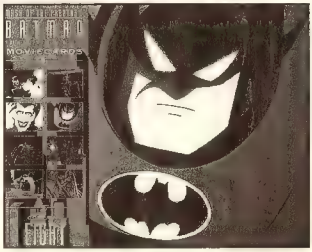

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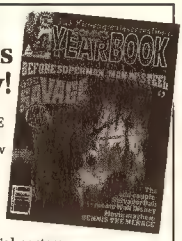

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Strange

(continued from page 35)

gether once.' Yes, but *why* was it called *Strange Tales*? What was so strange about them?

"At one point, each of these books was going to have a subtitle. For *Tales of Suspense*, if the story was called 'The Prometheus Agenda,' the subtitle would be 'A Tale of Suspense.' That got to be a problem when [then-editor] Fabian Nicieza asked me the title of the *Strange Tales* graphic novel. I told him 'Strange Tales.' So, it would be called *Strange Tales*, 'Strange Tales: A Strange Tale.' But, *that's* what it's all about. There are four or five *Strange Tales* logos that appear throughout the book. It's all about storytelling, and strange storytelling at that!"

Busiek says one of the best things about the project has been the chance to collaborate with artist Villagran. "I've been a big fan of Ricardo's work for a long time, ever since he was inking *The Futurians* over Dave Cockrum," says Busiek. "He has worked on *Star Trek, Conan* and *Darkhawk*. When I saw his painted work in a *Ka-Zar* graphic novel, I knew I wanted to work with him on a painted project. So, when Fabian asked, 'How would you feel about Ricardo Villagran?' it didn't take me long to say 'Yeah!' "

Working on *Strange Tales* required the artist to study up on Marvel history. "There have been some difficulties, simply based on the fact that Ricardo isn't steeped in superhero mythology the way the rest of us are," says Busiek. "The idea that on some pages Dr. Strange looks one way, and on other pages he has a blue cape, a blue amulet and a square head—we've had to go back and forth to make sure the various continuity references [from past stories by different artists] click together. It's one thing to deal with a character like the Thing, who I want to look like the Dick Ayers Thing in the flashbacks, and I want to look like a painted version of the modern-day Thing in the modern version—that's not a costume change, that's an artistic interpretation.

"Somebody who grew up with the Marvel superheroes, even if they did not read comics back in 1964, knows that stuff from reprints, and all of that stuff comes naturally. Ricardo didn't grow up on this stuff and required some editorial guidance to make sure he was capturing the essence of the right era at the right time. I think it has come out very nicely. The opening sequence is Nick Fury telling a story right out of the Jim Steranko period, and it's beautiful! The various flashbacks into Steve Ditko's Dr. Strange and the creepy, urban paranoia still comes through."

Although Busiek didn't begin reading comics until years after the original run of *Strange Tales*, he was first drawn to the title by the *Nick Fury Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* series.

"I loved the feeling of that hi-tech world with this brawny, visceral guy who's pretty much one step up from a barbarian," says Busiek. "I started to read the Thing-Torch stuff in a reprint magazine, and that was lots of fun! Paste-Pot Pete, the early Wizard stories, the Plantman stories are not high drama, but fun superhero stuff that didn't take itself too seriously. My take on the *Strange Tales* is 'strange' as in goofy, not 'strange' as in mysterious or horrifying.

"This is a very modern story," he notes. "It is not simply a re-creation of the old period, but when the Human Torch tells the story of when he and Dorrie Evans went out on a date and got involved with alligators in the sewers—this is goofy stuff for nine or 10 pages out of the 64. It has a point that feeds into the modern-day stuff. I wouldn't want people to think they're reading *Strange Tales* for a loopy time, yet you'll get that loopy flavor when we're harking back to when *Strange Tales* was a loopy book! You'll get that weird, paranoid, mystic flavor when we hark back to when *Strange Tales* was a weird, paranoid, mystic book, or the hi-tech espionage, or 1950s movie-monster horror of that period. What do all of those things have in common? I can't say without blowing the plot."

As much as he loved scripting *Strange Tales*, Busiek says the one-shot wasn't developed with a sequel in mind. "This is very much a graphic novel with a beginning, middle and end. There could be a sequel if the Powers That Be at Marvel wanted another *Strange Tales*. This is one stand-alone story. There have been hundreds of *Strange Tales* stories in the past, and if they really wanted to team up the Thing, Dr. Strange, Nick Fury and the Human Torch on a regular basis, I would think they were crazy!" he laughs.

"But as long as those characters are all alive in the Marvel Universe, it *could* happen. Could there be a sequel to *Moby Dick*? Sure. Is it set up for a sequel? No, it's not!"

Strange Tales definitely shares one common trait with *Tales to Astonish*, *Tales of Suspense* and Busiek's own *Marvels*—they are all a celebration of the past. "We are certainly honoring the past with a story that involves a melding of the past flavors of these characters with their present flavors," says Kurt Busiek. "It's the classic characters as you know them." CS

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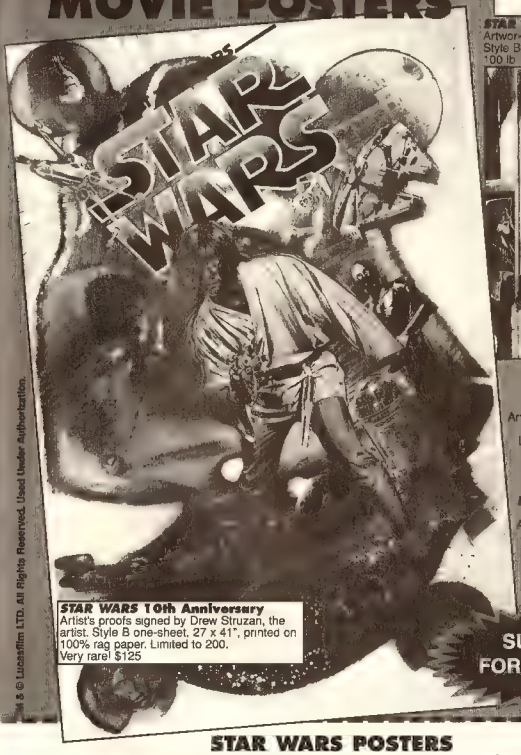

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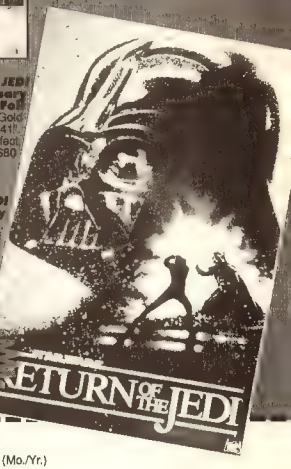

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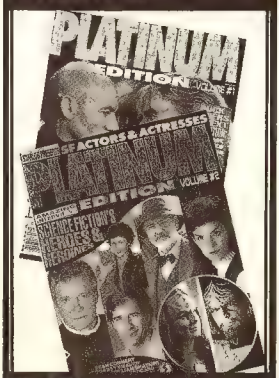

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Suspense

(continued from page 47)

graphic novel were things that occurred in the original *Tales of Suspense*. I tried to use continuity from that period, but you don't have to be familiar with those old stories in order to read this one. And if you haven't read a *Captain America* book since those days, you can still pick this up and enjoy it as a story in itself."

But that isn't all there is to this *Tales of Suspense*. "Another element is reflected in my subtitle, 'Men and Machines,' " Robinson reveals. "One of the things that tends to happen in many crossovers is that characters meet, they have a little fight, and then they come to an agreement and go off and fight the villain. These are godlike creatures, so even if you have powers, that doesn't mean you're not daunted by someone else. In the course of the story, I have Steve Rogers and Tony Stark examine themselves when compared to each other. Tony Stark is in this amazing metal suit, but as a man he's really flawed when compared to Steve Rogers, a perfect man both in mind and body. He's the ideal of perfection.

"On the other hand, Steve Rogers looks at the fact that he's this man out of time. It's something he's getting used to now, but he still has his roots and thoughts in the '40s, and he feels that the Iron Man armor is this potentially amazing device for good that he can never match. At his best, Steve Rogers is still only a man, whereas to him, this armor is something of the future. As a result, they both go into this mission a little daunted by each other, but they eventually come to terms with each other as well as themselves."

Robinson says there was no doubt in his mind about using the traditional versions of both characters: the Steve Rogers Captain America and the original Iron Man, Tony Stark. "To be honest, I'm not at all familiar with current Marvel continuity, so I would have no idea they weren't the current characters. Steve Rogers *is* Captain America, and he always will be. I don't know what short-term plans they have for the character, but there's no way he won't be Captain America in readers' eyes. The same applies to Tony Stark. They were both archetypes of their time. Although Captain America is really a hero of the '40s, he was re-created in the '60s."

To be certain that he was capturing the feel of the original *Tales of Suspense*, Robinson dug through some of the old issues to stir up memories. "I had the idea worked out, but I did go back and take a look. I tried to keep a lot of the fight scenes fairly big-paneled, with big moments, because Kirby used to do that, and I wanted to use some of his tricks.

"One of the things I realized, when I looked at those stories again with a fresh eye, is how crude and simplistic the plots are. When you're reading them as a child, that doesn't really sink in—how the villains are determined very quickly and easily, and then the fight occurs. Kirby was the master of the fight. Nobody did them better, and you got so wrapped up that you often didn't realize how simplistic and uncomplicated they were. I don't mean that in a dismissive fashion, but with this book, I tried to take the dynamics of those early stories and come up with a storyline that was a little more multi-layered."

Robinson, who scripted *Firearm* for Malibu and is currently writing the new *Starman* (CS #47) for DC, is writing *Tales of Suspense* as a full script. "I don't feel very comfortable with the 'Marvel style,' and I don't think I ever will. I'm in a position now where I can say how I want to work, and I really don't like that style. Fabian was very accommodating, and he's used to Marvel-style scripts, where a 24-page script can be 10 pages of plot, so when he got the script, which was more than 130 pages, I don't think he had ever seen anything quite like it. He read through it and was very supportive, and when Marc came aboard, he was equally supportive. They both had their feedback to add, but at no time did I feel stifled by it."

Complementing Robinson's script on the book is the detailed painted artwork of Colin MacNeil, whom Robinson had originally suggested as the perfect choice for the new *Tales of Suspense*. "Colin is really an unknown in America, but in England he's second only to Simon Bisley in terms of his popularity as a fully-painted *Judge Dredd* artist. I just thought he would be a good choice, and I'm very happy with him. Colin has brought a certain dynamic to it, and he has a certain angular style which echoes Kirby in some ways."

Although James Robinson is known for doing books of a more thoughtful, adult nature, he hopes comic book readers will find *Tales of Suspense* to be a carefree and exciting throwback to Marvel's Silver Age. "I guess I *am* getting a reputation for doing comic books at the more mature end of the spectrum," he notes. "I haven't done too much work for Vertigo, but I do hear that observation leveled at me quite a lot. In this case, I've tried to tread the fine line between that and a really rollicking superhero adventure, and I hope I've been successful." CS

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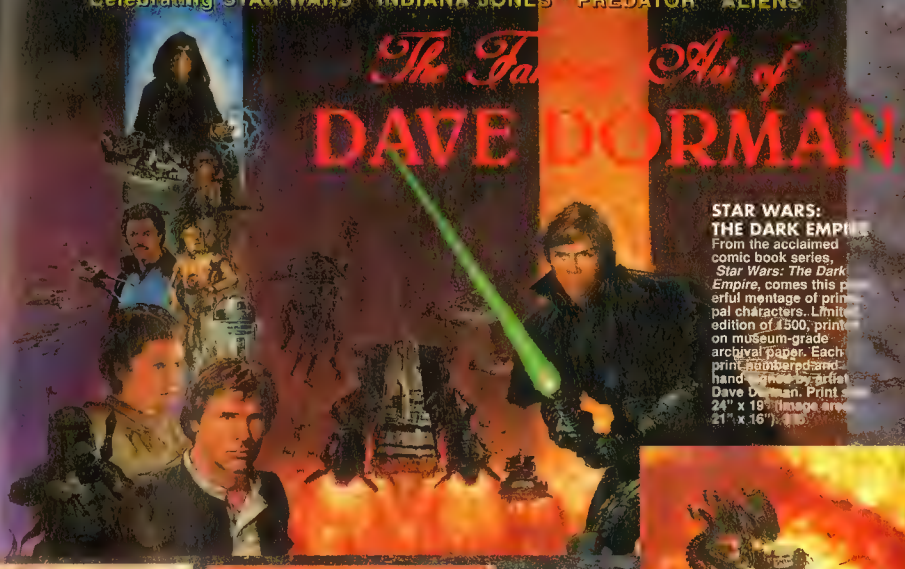

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ANIMATION SCENE

Flintstones Art: Copyright 1994 Hanna-Barbera Cartoons, Inc.

Riding on the success of the live-action film, the Flintstones are back with *A Flintstones Christmas Carol*.

'Tis The Season To Be Toony

It wouldn't be the holiday season without holiday cartoons, right? Aside from traditional favorites like *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, let's see what's on this year.

Stoneage Holiday: *A Flintstones Christmas Carol* is currently running in syndication on TBS, airing between November 21 and December 18 in 143 markets. Producer/director is Joanna Romesa; story editor is Gordon Kent; writer is Glenn Leopold; executive producers are William Hanna, Joseph Barbera and Buzz Potamkin.

Four Perennial Pictures: *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* stars Harold the Turtle, who wants to impress a girl turtle, but is embarrassed because he doesn't have a shell. In *Jolly Old St. Nicholas*, Scuddle Mutt and Clawdia Cat dress up like elves to win a Christmas talent contest and end up riding Santa's sleigh. *Deck the Halls* has Aunt Edwina trying to take advantage of two orphan kids to win an inheritance. *O Christmas Tree* is also a series pilot, in which two polar bears, Edgar Allan Snow and Iggy Lou, feud over the only Christmas tree at the North Pole. These 30-minute specials are available on home video from Video Treasures for $12.99, and could pop up in syndication. The producer/directors are Jerry Reynolds and Russell F. Harris, co-producer is Michael N. Rugiero. The studio is Indianapolis-based Perennial Pictures, which does all of its production work in the United States, including ink-and-paint services.

Christmas on the Cartoon Network: The toon channel will be celebrating with a plethora of specials beginning December 12 with *'Tis the Season to be Smurfy* (1987), *A Christmas Story* (1972), *Christmas Comes to Pacland* (1982), *The Little Troll Prince* (1987), *Flintstones Christmas* (1977) and *Yogi's First Christmas* (1980). *A Space Ghost Coast to Coast* special is scheduled for December 24.

The Cartoon Network hosts a New Year's Eve party featuring musical-themed toons such as *The Impossibles*, *Josie & the Pussycats*, *Butch Cassidy*, etc. New Year's Day brings a marathon of 12 of the 16 episodes of *The New Shmoo* from 1979. After that come four *Jetsons* episodes spotlighting Rosie the Robot for a "Rosie Bowl."

A Caped Crusader Christmas: Due early this December is the *Batman Adventures Holiday Special*, which features favorite characters from *Batman: The Animated Series* The one-shot comic is written by Paul Dini and illustrated by series artists and directors Kevin Altieri, Dan Riba, Glen Murakami and Ronnie del Carmen. The stories are a mixture of comedy, tragedy and general holiday fun, starring Batgirl, Mr. Freeze, Harley & Ivy, the Joker and of course, Batman. And the holiday fun? Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy take Bruce Wayne Christmas shopping. The Joker makes a terrifying New Year's resolution. And Mr. Freeze decides to attack Gotham on Christmas Eve.

Film Roman's Christmas Special: It's *The Bears Who Saved Christmas*, a Toys 'R' Us-sponsored special airing Thanksgiving evening. A family is snow-bound in a mountain cabin on Christmas Eve. Two teddy bears, Christopher and Holly (Mary Kay Bergman), forage through the woods to find the perfect Christmas tree, but they wake the dreaded sleeping giant of the forest. The special stars Charlie (Buster Bunny) Adler as Christopher and Bobby Bucktooth, the legendary Jonathan Winters as Charlie, Henry Gibson as Flashy, Pam Dawber as Mom, B.J. Ward as Mrs. Bucktooth and Brad Garrett as nasty ol' Black Bart. Bohbot Entertainment is the distributor.

SWAT Kats Canned: It happened unexpectedly. *SWAT Kats* was doing reasonably well in the ratings, and there was talk of a third season. By late July, 13 episodes had been recorded for the show's second season; production was underway on episode #11. Suddenly, Turner Entertainment ordered its subsidiary, Hanna-Barbera, to cancel production altogether, and lay off creative personnel throughout the studio. The purge affected 25 in-house artists (including half the background department) and 75 freelancers.

As for *SWAT Kats*' cancellation, former employees were told that the show wasn't selling enough merchandise. But that's because there was hardly any merchandise or marketing to begin with! Therefore, Turner decided to cancel the show. Go figure.

SWAT Kats will have 10 new episodes this year; the final three have been recorded and storyboarded and, at this point, are in limbo. First season episodes are now being broadcast on the Cartoon Network.

Hanna-Barbera's All New Shorts: Beginning in January, the Cartoon Network will feature "World Premiere Toons," a seven-minute short every two weeks, for a total of 48 new cartoons over the next two years. These shorts will serve as pilot episodes for new cartoon series, if the public's response is favorable. The humor is geared primarily to the eight-12 crowd, but also to adults.

These shorts have been announced so far:

"Dexter's Laboratory," by Genndy Tartakovsky. Boy genius Dexter (Christin Cavanaugh) is pestered by his sister Dee Dee (Allison Moore), who

Wouldn't you love to take a ride with jolly *Old St. Nicholas*?

A pilot for a new series, *O Christmas Tree* is also the object of desire for two bears.

insists on using his invention that turns people into animals. This is based on one of Tartakovsky's student films from CalArts. Kath Soucie voices Mom.

"Hard Luck Duck," William Hanna's first solo directorial effort since 1941. A fox (Jim Cummings) wants to serve Hard Luck Duck (Lee Guest) at his Cajun Cafe—but not if Hard

"Short Orders" stars Yuckie Duck, a restaurant waiter and cook. This is an original character from director Ventura. Bill Kopp voices Yuckie. Marsha Clark is Doris, Victor Love is the restaurant manager and Earl Kress is Diner Guy.

"Johnny Bravo," based on the student film by Loyola Marymount graduate, director Van Partible. A blond rock 'n' roller reminiscent of Elvis Presley, Johnny Bravo (Jeff Bennett) has a penchant for

Although they'll have 10 new episodes, *SWAT Kats* was shot down from the schedule. Alas, we knew them well.

Luck's friend, Harley the Alligator (Brad Garrett), can help it. Sounds like a revised version of Yakky Doodle.

Joe Barbera directs "Stay Out!" in which Dino struggles to put Baby Puss, the Flintstones' saber-toothed cat, out for the night. Both are voiced by Frank Welker. Henry Corden voices Fred, Jean VanderPyl voices Wilma.

"Look Out Below" stars two Tex Avery bears, George and Junior, by first-time director Pat Ventura. George (John Rubinow) and Junior (Tony Pope) try to replace a light bulb atop a tower, but they're stymied by a pigeon (Rob Paulsen) seeking peace and quiet. Animation by Fil-Cartoons. Ventura's credits include three Roger Rabbit shorts, *Smurfs* and *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures*.

"George & Junior's Christmas Spectacular!" pits the bears against an ornery dog (J.K. Carter, also voicing Santa).

swinging hips and annoying women. Johnny's out to win the affections of an attractive zoo keeper, Mary (Soleil Moon Frye), by trying to catch her escaped 800-pound gorilla (Roger Rose). Maurice La Marche voices Big Fat Roy, Mae Margaret Whitman is the little girl, Pat Musick is Grandma.

"Tales of the City" comes from *Cool World*'s Ralph Bakshi, the first of five shorts he'll do for Hanna-Barbera. Sweet, babyish Melvin considers suicide when other people receive the acclaim he feels he deserves. Melvin's mind is changed by Malcolm, a jazz-playing cockroach.

"Short (Yet Sensitive) Phuse" (a.k.a."Mad About Bombs") stars a land shark named Phish (Robert Picardo) and a lynx named Chip (Jeff Bennett), a team assigned to dispose of the Mad Bomber's (Pat Fraley) bombs. This short is by Rahn Thomas and Butch Hartman.

Hartman's credits include *Droopy: Master Detective* and *SWAT Kats*. Bennett also voices the Chief, Steven Calabro voices D-2 and the Pizza Delivery Boy.

"Meat Fuzzy Lumkins" introduces the Powerpuff Girls, a trio of schoolgirls who behave like Japan's *Dirty Pair*, saving the world from evil. Director Craig McCracken art-directed *2 Stupid Dogs*. The voice cast includes E.G. Daily (Buttercup), Kath Soucie (Bubbles, Teacher), Cathy Cavidini (Blossom) and Jim Cummings (Fuzzy, Mayor).

"Sledgehammer O'Possum" (Faison Love) bothers a dog (Dogg, voiced by Larry B. Scott) who visits the country for an afternoon lunch in "Out and About." Ventura directs.

"Cow and Chicken" (a.k.a. "Cow and Chicken Go to Hell") is by David Feiss, whose credits include *Super Secret Secret Squirrel*, *Alvin and the Chipmunks* and *Fish Police*. Big brother Chicken and little sister Cow contend with the Devil.

"Rest and Pizzas" features "updated" versions of Lippy the Lion and Hardy Har Har, written and directed by Scott Shaw!

"Raw Deal in Rome" introduces Shake, a nervous dog, and Flick, a hungry flea out to eat him. This latest flea-genre cartoon joins the tradition of Bob Clampett's "An Itch in Time" (1943) and Ken Boyer's "Starting from Scratch" (*Tiny Toon Adventures*, 1990). Created and directed by Eugene Thomas, whose credits include *SWAT Kats* and *The Pirates of Dark Water*. And speaking of fleas...

Moxy Gets Picked On: The Cartoon Network's computer-generated mascot, Moxy, is now being pestered by Flea, a saucy new character voiced by Penn Jillette (of comic-magician team Penn & Teller fame). Comedian Bobcat Goldthwait voices Moxy, the canine handyman who treats viewers to his personal cartoon favorites on the daily *Moxy Picks*.

The Moxy Show (formerly *The Moxy Pirate Show*) began its second season in October, showing Sundays at 8 p.m. EST.

More Space Ghost Coast to Coast: Seven episodes have been made for the second season, which began in September. Scheduled guests this season include Adam West, "Weird" Al Yankovic, Donny Osmond, Danny Bonaduce, Dr. Joyce Brothers and Jimmie Walker.

The Cartoon Network hired local Atlanta talent to voice the animated characters, with George Lowe as "What's *your* secret identity?" Space Ghost, and C. Martin Croker as "I'm not a locust, I'm a mantis" Zorak and "I hate Space Ghost"

Toys 'R' Us has sponsored *The Bears Who Saved Christmas*, with Jonathan Winters doing a voice.

Moltar. The original Space Ghost was, of course, voiced by Gary Owens, with versatile Don Messick performing Zorak. The reason Owens isn't used is because, "He's out of our price range."

Kudos to Kurtz & Friends: They won an Emmy Award at the 46th Annual Primetime Emmy Awards held September 11. The category was Best Animated Program (one hour or less) for their PBS special, *The Roman City*, produced, directed and written by Bob Kurtz, and written by Mark Olshaker. The hour-long special is not yet available on home video.

***The 50 Greatest Cartoons*:** Animation authority Jerry Beck has edited this 192-page hard-

Poor "Hard Luck Duck." He wants desperately to get in the Cajun Café, and maybe director William Hanna—yes, *that* Hanna—will let him.

Video Toon Art Copyright 1994 Personal Photo Album

SWAT Kats, Duck, Dino, Bravo, Phish, Melvin & Powerpuff Characters & Art Copyright 1994 Hanna-Barbera Cartoons, Inc.

Bears Art Copyright 1994 Film Roman, Inc.

cover book, which showcases the top 50 theatrical cartoons, as selected by nearly 1,000 animation historians and professionals, including this writer. Beck gives each short a production history, synopsis, credits and his expert opinion on what makes the cartoon so special. The book has 200 color and 100 black & white illustrations. The perfect Christmas gift for Toon buffs, it's now available from Turner Publishing, $29.95 ($39.95 in Canada).

Tweety-Doo, Where Are You? Warner Bros. is starting its new TV network this January, but it won't be until fall that it airs new 'toons for its Saturday morning schedule. Among them are 65 new half-hours of *The*

Look who else is back in the directing chair—Joe Barbera with "Stay Out."

Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries. It features Granny as a globe-trotting mystery writer with Sylvester and Tweety in tow. It's kind of a combination of *Murder, She Wrote* and the 1948 Merrie Melodies short "Scaredy Cat." Former *Mighty Mouse* writer Tom Minton is the story editor/producer. Michael Gerard is co-producer.

Steven Spielberg joins forces with the creative team behind *Batman: The Animated Series* to produce *Freakazoid!* It's about a shy, nerdy kid who becomes a superhero, a cross between Superman and the Creeper, fighting various bizarro super-villains for 65 episodes. Co-producers are Dini and Timm. Another writer is Evan Dorkin, responsible for the cult comic *Milk and Cheese*.

The Fox Children's Network is letting its option lapse on *Animaniacs*. For the 1995-96 season, the show will move to the WB Television Network (whose mascot/icon will be Michigan J. Frog from Chuck Jones' classic "One Froggy Evening). Thirteen new episodes are in production.

On the horizon for 1996: *Superman*.

Film Roman Gets *The Mask*: New Line Cinema and Dark Horse Entertainment are developing *The Mask* for Saturday morning, to be produced by Film Roman, the studio behind *The Simpsons* and *Garfield*. Duane Cappizzi, who story-edited *ALF* and *Aladdin*, will probably be the head writer. The producer is Gary Hartle, who directed several *Taz-Mania* episodes and produced the first two seasons of *Mighty Max*. *The Mask* is slated to begin airing on CBS this March.

The question is, on a limited animation budget, will Stanley Ipkiss be able to stretch and squash with the same flair as in the movie?

Disney's Feature Future: Although *The Goofy Movie* was meant for this holiday season, production problems in the French animation unit have caused the film to be delayed to spring 1995 release. Some scenes have been repaired by Disney's Feature Animation unit in Glendale, California.

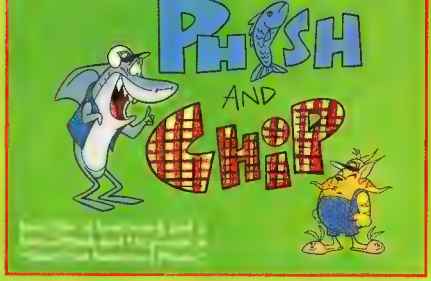
So, what's Disney's animated holiday release going to be? A reissue of *The Lion King*, complete with a new ad campaign and release to 1,500 theaters. The film was withdrawn from theaters September 23 to give it a rest before its re-release this month. According to a Disney spokesman, *The Lion King* is being reissued because "there's a dearth of animated films during the holidays this year."

Take that, *Pagemaster* and *Swan Princess*.

Next spring, Disney plans to re-release their 1988 entry *Oliver and Company*.

Disney's Home Video Success: As of September, *The Return of Jafar* has sold over eight million copies, ranking among the top 10 bestselling videos of all time. Not surprisingly, Disney TV Animation is planning another *Aladdin* video sequel, which features the wedding of Aladdin and Jasmine. They're also considering OVAs of animated features still in the development stage, including *Hercules* and *Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas made its video debut in September. The 1993 film grossed $50 million in theaters; it employed stop-motion techniques that earned an Oscar nomination for Best Visual Effects. The 76-minute feature retails for $19.99.



You can also get the most-requested film ever for video, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Made at a cost of $1.5 million, it's the first and highest-grossing animated film of all time. Taking inflation into account, in its nine domestic releases, it has grossed a billion dollars!

Both VHS video ($26.99) and CLV laserdisc ($29.99) versions became available October 28. For $99.99, a Deluxe CAV Laserdisc Edition offers *Snow White, The Making of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the Hyperion hardcover *Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and the Making of the Classic Film*, and 10 limited-edition lithographs of the theatrical posters. Look for the $5 rebate offers from Pillsbury products and Disney videos.

Snow White is the first title in a new Disney video series called "The Masterpiece Collection." The studio plans a media blitz that will—ahem—dwarf its previous promotions.

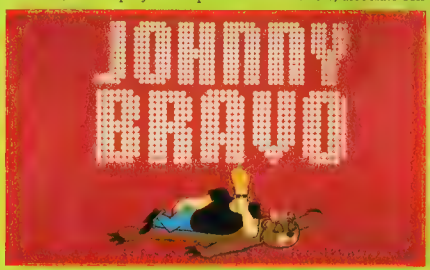
The Truth About Snow White: All will be revealed in three other books from Hyperion, published to tie-in with the video release. *Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: An Art in Its Making*, by Martin Krause, curator at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and Linda Witkowski, associate conservator of paintings at the IMA, details the history of the film from its conception through its production. Some 185 full-color illustrations are reproduced from the collection of Stephen H. Ison. The book retails for $45.

You can also get *Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: An Animated Flip Book* for $3.95, with 48 color frame enlargements from the "Silly Song" scene. When flipped the other way, you see the drawings in pencil form. *Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: A Postcard Book* has 30 scenes ($8.95).

Ralph Bakshi is back in the animation arena with "Tales of the City," starring suicidal Melvin and a cockroach.

Disney's Monday Mania: The mania begins in January on the Disney Afternoon. On Mondays, *Bonkers* is replaced by *The Shnookums & Meat Funny Cartoon Show*, written and produced by Bill (*Eek! The Cat*) Kopp, co-produced and directed by Jeff DeGrandis. The half-hour contains three shorts featuring gags appealing to the *Ren & Stimpy* crowd.

Five episodes of the lead short, *Shnookums & Meat*, first appeared last season on CBS Saturday mornings, during *Marsupilami*. These alternated with shorts featuring Sebastian the Crab, but *S&M* proved so popular that Disney commissioned a series for the Disney Afternoon, with eight additional episodes. The show pits a spoiled housecat, Shnookums (Jason Marsden) against a manly dog named Meat (Welker) while their owners Man (Steve Mackall) and Woman (Tress Mac-

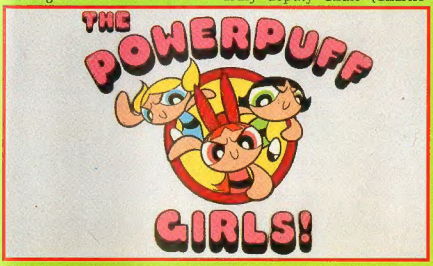


Swinging hips and annoying women will get "Johnny Bravo" to come to your party.

Nielle) are away from the house.

The producers adopted a method championed by John Kricfalusi for *Ren & Stimpy* as well as Eddie Fitzgerald and Ken Boyer for *Tiny Toon Adventures*, by having character layout done in the States. Charlie Bean, Mark Kausler and Robert Sledge supplied the layouts while Lynn Naylor provided art direction and design (Naylor is currently designing Spielberg's *Freakazoid!* at Warner Bros.).

The Adventures of Pith Possum: Super Dynamic Possum of Tomorrow is Bill Kopp's response to shows with people running around in the dark in their tights.



The Powerpuff Girls kick butt and take names in "Meat Fuzzy Lumpkins."

Hence, an arboreal version of *Darkwing Duck*. Opossum City is defended by Pith Possum (Jeff Bennett) and his sidekick Obediah the Raccoon (Patrick Zimmerman, who voiced Elroy Jetson in *Jetsons—The Movie*). By day, Pith is Peter Opossum, a lowly copy boy for the *Weakly World Horseapple*. Peter loves reporter Doris Deer (April Winchell), who cares more about Pith. Dr. Shockter is the human maniac out to destroy Pith and his pals. Regulars include Commissioner Stress (Garrett), Lt. Tension (Jess Harnell of *Super Secret Secret Squirrel*) and the obligatory narrator (Jim Cummings, *Darkwing Duck*). Pith saves the day in eight-and-a-half minutes.

The third short, *Tex Tinstar: The Best in the West*, spoofs Western heroes. Originally "Tex Teflon," the name was changed because Teflon is trademarked. Each four-minute episode has Sheriff Tex—a cross between Jimmy Stewart and Clint Eastwood—involved in cliffhangers where he's shot, flattened by a train, drowned, buried alive, dragged by a wild horse, etc. When the next episode begins, Tex recovers and with a grimace, growls, "Ah'm mad now."

Tex (Bennett) and his cowardly deputy Chafe (Charlie Adler) contend with "The Wrong Riders," a trio of hombres out to rob the bank and kidnap Tex's gal, Monica Betty Lou Sue Veronica. Cummings is the narrator, again.

Thirteen episodes of *The Shnookums and Meat Funny Cartoon Show* have been produced—and that's all. Kopp has left to do a feature for Hanna-Barbera. DeGrandis' crew has shifted to *Timon and Pumbaa*.

***Gargoyles* on the Loose:** Although, officially, Disney is waiting to see how *Gargoyles* performs in the ratings before producing a second season, 13 more episodes have already been written and voice-recorded. Also, a direct-to-video release is being considered.

Roman Art: Clint Taylor/Copyright Kurtz & Friends.

Will the Emmy-winning *The Roman City* make it to video? Did Rome fall?

Originally, a cute, comedic approach had been envisioned for *Gargoyles*. But the "cartoon noir" influence of *Batman* shifted the show's emphasis to dark drama. Indeed, key *Batman* talent are aboard for *Gargoyles*: Frank Paur became the show's producer; story editor J. Michael Reaves joined the staff in October 1993, commissioning scripts from *Batman* writers Brynne Stevens, Marty Isenberg and Bob Skir.

Viewers will also note a Japanese animation influence. That's because the series is entirely produced—from storyboards to animation—at Disney's studio in Tokyo. Why? Disney management believes the Japanese produce better looking action-adventure cartoons. Are they right?

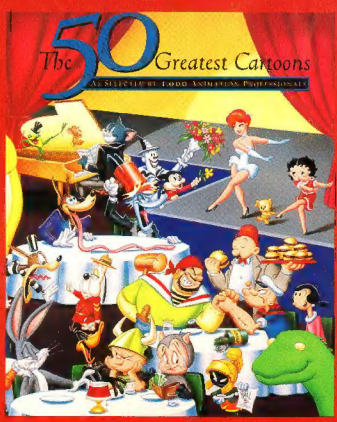
The Circle of Life Rolls On: Timon, Pumbaa and the adult Simba star in *The Circle of Life*, a 70mm animation/live action presentation in production in Florida. The film will replace *Symbiosis* at the Land Pavilion at EPCOT Center. Bruce Morris is animation director; Clare Baren is associate producer.

Meanwhile, *Lion King*'s $260 million-plus success has caught the attention of Disney TV animation. A direct-to-video sequel, plus a Saturday morning series is in the works starring Timon and Pumbaa. The question is, will the network censors let Pumbaa do what he does best?

—Bob Miller

Space Ghost Art: Copyright 1994 Cartoon Network

What do Adam West and Jimmy Walker have in common? They'll both be on *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*.



Greatest Cartoons Art: Courtesy Turner Publishing, Inc.

Can you find your favorite character on the cover of Jerry Beck's *The 50 Greatest Cartoons*?

COMICS screen

COMICS REPORTER

All of these projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Am: Amblin; DH: Dark Horse; FR: Film Roman; QDE: Quincy Davis Entertainment. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 10/15/94)

The Airtight Garage. AN. EP: Kurosawa Ent. P: Philippe Rivier. D: Moebius, Katsuhiro Otomo. S: Randy Lofficier.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

Archie. Film. DIC.

The Badger. Film/TV. PP.

Barbarella. Film. Nel.

❑ **Batman Forever.** Sequel. W/Val Kilmer. D: Joel Schumacher. Shooting.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck.

Biker Mice from Mars. Film. P: Al Ruddy. Andre Morgan, David Chan. S: Greg Johnson

Blade. S: David S. Goyer. D: Ernest Dickerson.

Cage. P: Ed Pressman.

Casper. Film. Am/U. D: Brad Silberling. Summer '95.

Catwoman. Film. WB. S: Dan Waters.

Crying Freeman. Film. D: C. Gans. P: Brian Yuzna.

❑ **Daredevil.** Film. Fox. D: Carlo Carlei. S: Carlei, Chris Columbus.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

❑ **Double Dragon.** Film. Out November.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. U.

Elektra Assassin. Film.

Elfquest. AN film. P: Ed Pressman.

❑ **Fantastic Four.** AN series. LA film. D: Chris Columbus.

Faust. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. S: David Quinn.

Felix the Cat. AN. FR.

Fist of the North Star. Film.

❑ **Freakazoid.** AN series. WB/Am. P: Bruce Timm, Paul Dini.

Ghost Rider. Film. S: David S. Goyer.

G.I. Joe. Film.

Gothik. Film. P: Jeff Most.

Green Hornet. Film. U.

❑ **Grimjack.** Film.

Hate. AN Film. S: Peter Bagge. Colossal Pictures.

Incredible Hulk. Film. U. P: Gale Anne Hurd.

Inspector Gadget. Film. S: J. Loeb III, M. Weisman. U.

Iron Man. AN series.

Art: Jae Lee/Courtesy Surge

He's an intergalactic ninja—and ready to *Zen* out for the movies.

❑ **Jonny Quest.** AN & LA films. New AN series.

Judge Dredd. Film. W/Sylvester Stallone, S: Bill Wisher. D: Danny Cannon. July '95 bow.

Kull. Film. U. S: C. Pogue.

Li'l Abner. Film. P: Ernest Chambers.

Lt. Blueberry. Film. P: Eclectic Films.

Little Lulu. AN. Lulu: Tracey Ullman.

Machine. Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.

❑ **The Mask.** AN series. FR. CBS.

The Men in Black. Film. Col.

Mickey Mouse. New AN theatrical shorts. WD.

❑ **Mighty Morphin Power Rangers.** Film. D: Bryan Spicer.

Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.

Modesty Blaise. Film. Miramax. P: Marcelo Anciano, Michael Berrow.

❑ **Mortal Kombat.** Film. P: Larry Kasanoff. W/Christopher Lambert. Now shooting.

❑ **Neverending Story.** AN. Nel.

❑ **Nexus.** AN film. HB.

Pagemaster. AN/LA film. D: Joe Johnston. Fox/HB. Out.

Peanuts. Film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.

❑ **The Phantom.** Film. PP. Phantom: Billy Zane. Shelved shortly before shooting was to start.

Pit Bulls. Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am.

Pocahontas. AN film. WD.

Prince Valiant. Film. S: M. Beckner, Roger Kumble, Marlene King. N. Constantin.

Richie Rich. Film. P: Joel Silver, J. Davis. D: Don Petrie. W/Macaulay Culkin. X-Mas.

The Saint. Film. PP.

❑ **Sandman.** Film. S: Ted Elliott. Terry Rossio.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. S/D: John Milius. WB.

Sheena. TV series. Col.

Sin City. S: Frank Miller.

Speed Racer. Film. S: J.J. Abrams. WB.

❑ **Spider-Man.** AN. (see article) LA film. D: Jim Cameron.

❑ **The Spirit.** LA & AN projects. P: Michael Uslan, Ben Melnicker.

Spy vs. Spy. Film. S: Gene Quintano. P: Steven Tisch, QDE.

❑ **Street Fighter.** LA Film. S/D: Steven E. de Souza. W/Jean-Claude Van Damme. X-Mas.

Stretch Armstrong. Film. D: Jay Dubin. S: Mike Werb, Michael Colleary.

Tank Girl. Film. D: Rachel Talalay. S: Tedi Sarafian. W/ Lori Petty. P: Trilogy Ent. UA.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV. LA film. New Line.

❑ **Terry & the Pirates.** TV. Syn. Intended to debut fall 1995.

V for Vendetta. Film. S: Hilary Henkin. D: Brett Leonard. P: Joel Silver.

Virus. Film. DH. S: Chuck Pfarrer. P: Gale Anne Hurd. U.

X. Film. DH. U.

X-Men. Film. Fox. P: Lauren Shuler-Donner. S: Andrew Kevin Walker.

❑ **Yummy Fur.** Film. D: Bruce McDonald. Yorktown Prods.

❑ **Zen.** Film. D: Brian Yuzna.

Zorro. Film. D: Mikael Salomon. TriStar. S: Terry Rossio, Ted Elliott.

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Jean-Claude Van Damme leads the action in *Street Fighter* (due out this month).

Street Fighter Photo: Copyright 1994 Universal City Studios, Inc.

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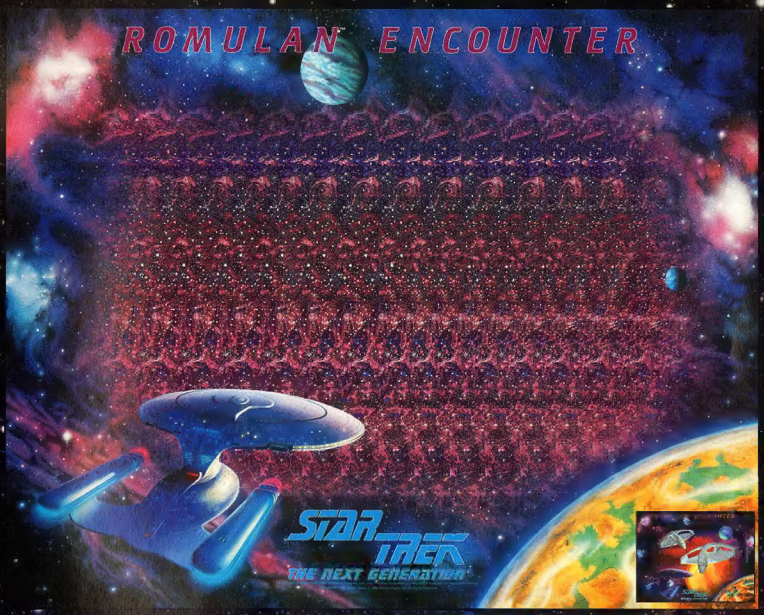

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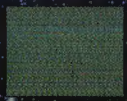
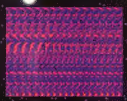

Invisible

Pegasus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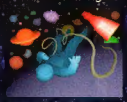

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